



**DO YOUR PART, BE
SEPTICSMART!**

www.epa.gov/septicSMART

THE BASICS

What Is a Septic System?

Common in rural areas without centralized sewer systems, septic systems are underground wastewater treatment structures that use a combination of nature and time-tested technology to treat wastewater from household plumbing produced by bathrooms, kitchen drains, dishwasher and laundry.

It is the end point of your home's plumbing system like your furnace is for your heat and AC!



Do You Have a Septic System?

You may already know you have a septic system. If you don't know, here are tell-tale signs that you probably do:

- You use well water.
- The waterline coming into your home doesn't have a meter.
- You show a "\$0.00 Sewer Amount Charged" on your water bill.
- Your neighbors have a septic system.

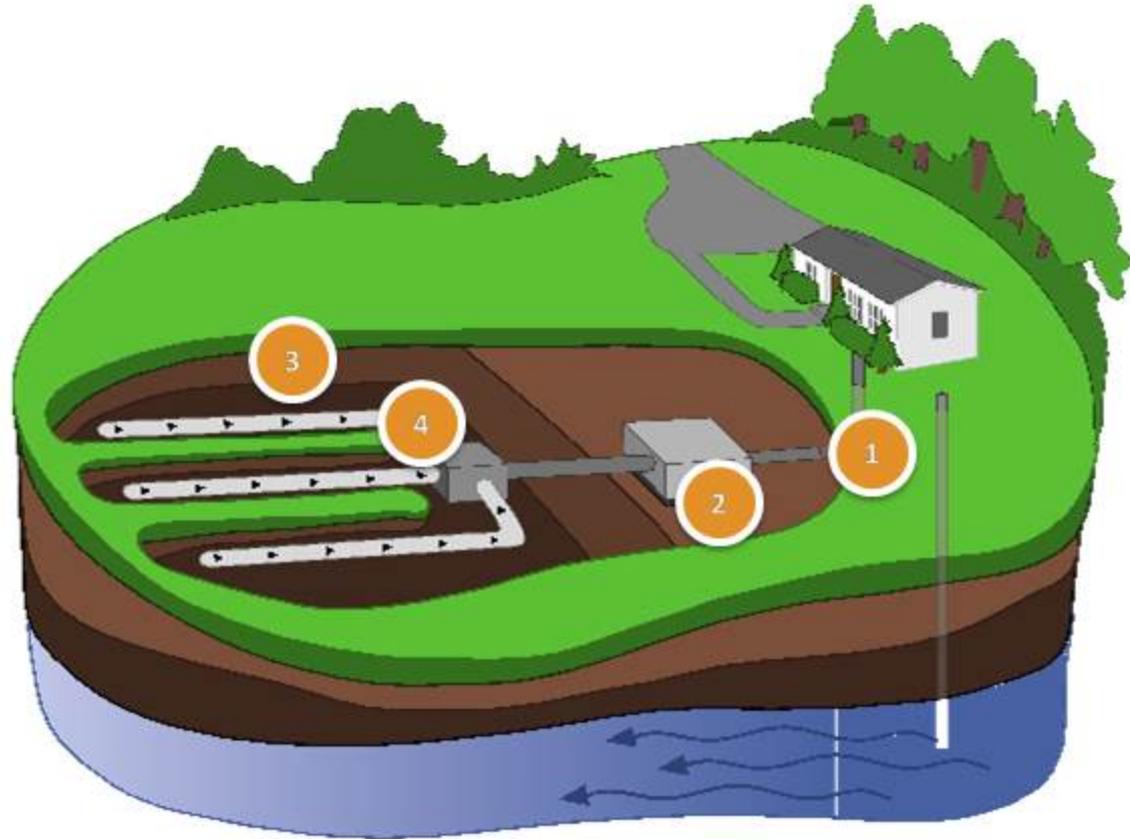
If you have a septic it is **YOUR** responsibility to maintain it!



How does a septic system work?

This is a simplified overview of how a septic system works.

- 1 All water runs out of your house from one main **drainage pipe** into a septic tank.
- 2 The **septic tank** is a buried, water-tight container usually made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene. Its job is to hold the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle down to the bottom (forming sludge), while the oil and grease floats to the top (as scum). Compartments and a T-shaped outlet prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the drainfield area.
- 3 The liquid wastewater then exits the tank into the **drainfield**. If the drainfield is overloaded with too much liquid, it will flood, causing sewage to flow to the ground surface or create backups in toilets and sinks.
- 4 Finally, the wastewater percolates into the **soil**, naturally removing harmful bacteria, viruses, and nutrients.



Groundwater = source of your well water

WHY MAINTAIN?

- Saves you \$
 - A few hundred dollars every 3-5 years for maintenance or ~\$8k to replace.
- Protects your property value
 - Homes with failing septics could be more difficult to sell.
- Protects your and your neighbors' well water
 - A failing septic can contaminate well water; test your well water quality (untreated to your tap).
- Protects your and your neighbors' health
 - A failing septic can bring wastewater above the surface, creating a health hazard for you, your neighbors and animals.



Failure Symptoms – Mind the Signs!

A foul odor isn't always the first sign of a [malfunctioning septic system](#).

Call a septic professional if you notice any of the following:

- Wastewater backing up into household drains.
- Bright green, spongy grass on the drainfield, even during dry weather.
- Pooling water or muddy soil around your septic system or in your basement.
- A strong odor around the septic tank and drainfield.

One call to a septic professional could save you thousands of dollars!

Contact your local or state health department for more information.



PROPER CARE

Four major factors influence the frequency of septic pumping:

- Household size
- Total wastewater generated
- Volume of solids in wastewater
- Septic tank size

Household septic tanks are typically pumped every three to five years. Alternative systems with electrical float switches, pumps, or mechanical components need to be inspected more often, generally once a year.

Call a licensed professional!





Sam's Do's and Don'ts

PROTECT IT AND INSPECT IT

THINK AT THE SINK

DON'T OVERLOAD THE COMMUNE

SHIELD YOUR FIELD

DON'T STRAIN THE DRAIN

SepticSmart Website

The screenshot shows the SepticSmart website homepage. On the left is a vertical navigation menu with categories like Education & Training, Grants & Funding, Laws & Regulations, Our Waters, Pollution Prevention & Control, Resources & Performance, Science & Technology, Water Infrastructure, Drinking Water, Green Infrastructure, Septic Systems, Sustainable Infrastructure, Water Security, Wastewater, WaterSense, and What You Can Do. The main content area features a large orange banner with the text 'Welcome to SepticSmart Homeowners, learn the ins and outs of your septic system.' and a cartoon character in a green uniform. Below the banner are numbered tabs (1-4) and a 'SepticSmart en Español' link. A row of navigation buttons includes 'Home', 'The Basics', 'Why Maintain?', 'Proper Care', and 'Resources'. The 'Welcome to SepticSmart!' section contains two paragraphs of introductory text. On the right, there are two sidebars: 'SepticSmart Quick Links' with a list of links like 'SepticSmart Week' and 'System Failure Causes', and 'Looking to Launch a Local Outreach Campaign?' with a link to 'Check out the SepticSmart Outreach Toolkit!' and an icon of a red toolbox.

www.epa.gov/septicmart



SepticSmart Toolkit

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

Advanced Search [A-Z Index](#)

LEARN THE ISSUES SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY LAWS & REGULATIONS ABOUT EPA

Water: Septic (Onsite / Decentralized) Systems [Contact Us](#) [Share](#)

You are here: Water > Water Infrastructure > Septic (Onsite / Decentralized) Systems > Local Outreach Toolkit

Local Outreach Toolkit

[Home](#) [The Basics](#) [Why Maintain?](#) [Proper Care](#) [Resources](#)



Launch a Homeowners Outreach Program

You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view some of the files on this page. See EPA's PDF page to learn more about PDF, and for a link to the free Acrobat Reader.

How can EPA's SepticSmart initiative help promote your goals?

Across the country, local environmental groups, health departments, and governments face the challenges posed by improperly maintained and failing septic systems. EPA seeks to assist these local agencies in promoting homeowner education and awareness. Explore the tabs below to download printable homeowner-targeted materials, learn how organizations across the country have launched successful homeowner education programs, and more.

Can't find what you're looking for? Contact SepticSmart staff and let us know what materials would be most beneficial to your outreach efforts. New materials will be added to this Toolkit, so check back often and share this link with industry colleagues.

[SepticSmart Homeowner Materials](#) [Case Studies](#) [Additional EPA Resources](#)

Download these high-resolution PDF files for easy printing and

SepticSmart Quick Links

- System Failure Causes
- Frequent Questions
- Glossary
- Contacts

- EPA Decentralized Wastewater Home

Looking to Launch a Local Outreach Campaign?

- Check out the SepticSmart Outreach Toolkit!**

Government officials, industry professionals, environmental groups, and other local organizations can access ready-to-use educational materials, case studies, and more.





RESOURCES

Toolkit Materials (English & Spanish):

<http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic/local-outreach-toolkit.cfm>

- Homeowners' Guide (short and long)
- Do's and Don'ts (for conventional and advanced systems)
- Mail Insert
- Door Hanger
- Post Card Mailers
- Proper Landscaping

- SepticSmart en Español – dedicated webpage
 - <http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic/septicsmart-en-espanol.cfm>



Annual SepticSmart Week

- Last full week of September each year

The purpose is to educate using the messages of the SepticSmart program across the country about the importance of maintaining and properly caring for your septic system through your daily activities.

Highlighted Activities from 2014:

- Dedicated webpage
- Community highlights map
- Blogs
- News articles
- Workshops
- Exhibit of materials
- Proclamations
- PSAs/Radio Spots



Mark Your Calendars!

SepticSmart Week

September 21-25, 2015

