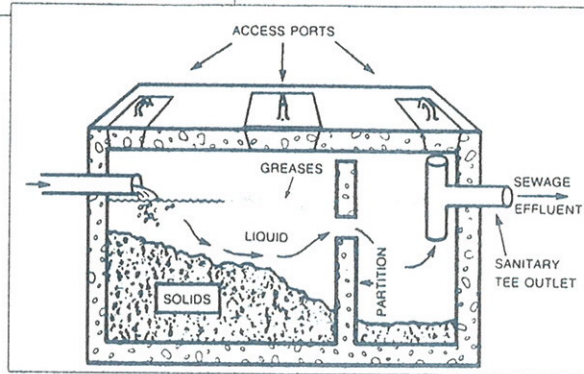


Septic Systems: A Homeowner's Guide

*Your Guide
to
Maintenance*



Since improperly maintained and failing septic systems are common sources of water pollution, the following information has been compiled to help you understand and maintain your septic system. This folder also provides a place to record and keep important information, such as a copy of your permit, a sketch of your system, maintenance records, and other fact sheets.

Carl Pearson

Things You Need to Know About Your Septic System

- What type of septic system do you have?
- Where is it located?
- Where is the repair area located?
- Is the septic system working properly?
- Has it been maintained in the past?
- How do you recognize a failing septic system?
- What maintenance is needed in the future?

Learning the Ins and Outs of Your System

What Type of System Do You Have?

Many different kinds of septic systems are used in North Carolina, but most of the systems used are slight modifications of the conventional septic system. This type has a septic tank and a drainfield with

The enclosed fact sheet describes the type of system you have and important maintenance needs for it.

Other types of systems include pump to conventional systems, pressure manifold systems, low pressure pipe (LPP) systems, and aerobic treatment unit (ATU) systems. These types of systems normally have pumps, electrical floats and controls, alarms, or other mechanical

reason, state rules have specific maintenance requirements for a number of these systems.

Guilford County Health Department can tell you what type of system you have and what legal requirements there are for long-term maintenance of that system. You may be required to have an operation permit from the Health Department and a maintenance contract with an approved "management entity" (organization). The management organization could be a certified septic system operator or a public agency involved in wastewater management. These maintenance activities will result in monthly or yearly system maintenance fees for homeowners, but they also should help improve the longevity and performance of these systems.

Do You Know the Location of Your Septic System and Repair Area?

To properly maintain your septic system, you should know the location of both the septic tank and the drainfield. Contact the Guilford County Health Department for a copy of your septic system permit and soil evaluation sheet, which will indicate the approximate location of the system and the size of the tank. Keep these items in this file folder.

A good starting point for finding the tank is to look in the crawl space to see the direction in which the house sewer pipe enters the soil. Then, gently push a thin (3/8-to 1/2-inch diameter) steel rod into the soil to feel for the tank about 10 feet away from the house. Of course, you should first call local utility companies to make sure there are not any underground utilities (such as buried electrical cables) in the area.

Most housing sites are legally required to have a repair area in which a second drainfield could be built if needed. This repair area is identified when the site is permitted. The law also requires you to protect this area from excavation, building, swimming pool construction, and other land-moving activities.

Sketch your home, septic system, repair area, and other important features (such as your driveway) on the grid labeled Septic System Layout. When you have your septic tank pumped, measure and record the distance from the house to the access port on the tank. This will help you find it again. You may also wish to mark the location of your tank and boundaries of your drainfield in your yard.

Is Your Septic System Working Properly?

Unfortunately, if house fixtures drain well, many people are not concerned about whether their septic system is working properly. They don't realize that untreated sewage can be a health hazard. If your system shows signs of problems contact the Guilford County Health Department immediately. They will diagnose the problem and prescribe changes or additions that must be made to repair the system.

State law requires that you get a permit from the Health Department before repairing a failing septic system. It is important that the system is repaired as soon as possible to minimize the health risk to your family and community.

What Maintenance Has Been Done?

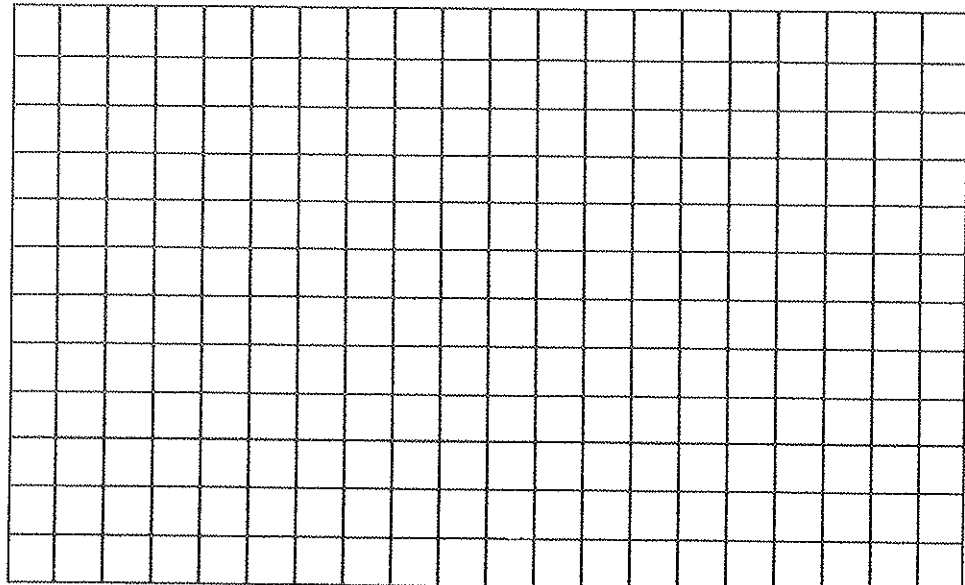
Before planning a maintenance program, find out what maintenance has already been done. If you are buying an existing home, ask the seller a few important questions such as:

- How old is the system?
- When was the tank last pumped?
- How frequently has it been pumped?
- Have there been any signs of possible failure?
- Have there been additions made to the house that would necessitate increasing the size of the system?

If the house has just been built, ask the septic system contractor to provide you an "as built" diagram that may show details not on the permit. If you have an LPP system, ask the contractor and Health Department to provide details concerning the initial pump delivery rate and pressure head they set up when the pressure distribution network was approved for use.

Proper care of your septic system requires day-to-day management as well as periodic maintenance and repairs.

SEPTIC SYSTEM LAYOUT



Signs of Possible Septic System Problems

- Sewage backing up into your toilets, tubs, or sinks.
- Slowly draining fixtures; particularly after it has rained.
- The smell of raw sewage accompanied by extremely soggy soil over the drainfield.
- Sewage discharged over the ground or in nearby ditches or woods. Note, in the LPP system sewage may come to the ground surface when the pump is turned on and then disappear after the pump turns off.
- Broken or cracked white pipes that stick out of the ground in a LPP system.
- An alarm flashing (red light) or beeping in the house, garage, crawl space, or in the yard indicating a pump is not working properly.
- An increase in infections or illnesses associated with swimming in lakes or rivers next to the system.
- Water test results indicating the presence of biological contamination or organic chemical contamination in the groundwater under the system.

What are some results of a nonfunctioning septic system and how can you recognize them?

Neglect or abuse of your septic system can cause it to fail. Failing septic systems can

- cause a serious health threat to your family and neighbors,
- degrade the environment, especially lakes, streams and groundwater,
- reduce the value of your property,
- be very expensive to repair,
- and, put thousands of water supply users at risk if you live in a public water supply watershed and fail to maintain your system.

What can you do to prevent future septic system problems?

- Do have your tank pumped out and system inspected every 3 to 5 years by a licensed septic contractor (listed in the yellow pages).
- DO keep a record of pumping, inspections, and other maintenance.
- DO practice water conservation. Repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets, run washing machines and dishwashers only when full, avoid long showers, and use water-saving features in faucets, shower heads and toilets.
- DO learn the location of your septic system and drainfield. Keep a sketch of it handy for service visits.

If your system has a flow diversion valve, learn its location, and turn it once a year. Flow

diverters can add many years to the life of your system.

- DO divert roof drains and surface water from driveways and hillsides away from the septic system. Keep sump pumps and house footing drains away from the septic system as well.
- DO take leftover hazardous household chemicals to your approved hazardous waste collection center for disposal. Use bleach, disinfectants, and drain and toilet bowl cleaner sparingly and in accordance with product labels.
- DON'T allow anyone to drive or park over any part of the system. The area over the drainfield should be left undisturbed with only a mowed grass cover. Roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage your drain lines.
- DON'T make or allow repairs to your septic

system without obtaining the required Guilford County Health Department permit. Use professional, licensed septic contractors when needed.

- DON'T use commercial septic tank additives. These products usually do not help and some may hurt your system in the long run.

- DON'T use your toilet as a trash can by dumping nondegradeables down your toilet or drains. Also, don't poison your septic systems and the groundwater by pouring harmful chemicals down the drain. They can kill the beneficial bacteria that treat your wastewater. Keep the following material out of your septic system:

Nondegradeables: grease, disposable diapers, plastics, etc.
Poisons: gasoline, oil, paint, paint thinner, pesticides, antifreeze, etc.

DATE	WORK DONE	FIRM	COST

YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM PUMPER

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM INSTALLER

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

DATE SYSTEM INSTALLED _____

For more information regarding your septic system, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Division - Water Quality Unit at 373-7613 in Greensboro and 884-7613 in High Point. Health - Line, a library of taped messages, can also provide you with information regarding your septic system. To use Health - Line call 373-4752 in Greensboro and 884-4752 in High Point.

This material was reproduced in part from Soil Facts: Septic System Owners Guide, published by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and A Reference Guide for Homeowners: Your Septic System, published by the Northern Virginia Planning District Commission.