



Septic System Best Management Practices

Septic systems protect human health and the environment by safely recycling wastewater and returning it to the natural environment. It is your job as the homeowner to be sure this happens effectively and safely. As with your car, regular maintenance and attention is needed to keep it operating efficiently in a cost effective manner.

Septic Tank	Soil Treatment Area: Trench or Mound
<p>Functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Separates into three layers: scum (stuff that floats), sludge (stuff that sinks), and the liquid. ___ The solids and scum are held until removed by the maintainer. Anaerobic bacteria work to break down wastes, prepare the liquid for the drainfield. ___ The liquid is delivered to the soil treatment area to complete the treatment process. ___ If solids are not removed, they can end up in the soil treatment area, causing (often irreparable) damage. ___ Factors that increase frequency of pumping: use of garbage disposal, water treatment unit that discharges into the septic system, in-home daycare or other reason a large number of people are present most of the time, laundry on the 2nd floor, excessive use of water and strong cleaning products. <p>Best management practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Tanks need to be evaluated every two to three years and pumped if necessary. Some counties require pumping on a specified basis. New homes—pump within 3—12 months of occupancy the first time. ___ Never allow a tank to be cleaned through the inspection pipe. This is not allowed by code, and it does not allow a good cleaning to occur. Scum can plug the baffle, baffles can be knocked off. Tanks should only be cleaned through the manhole or maintenance hole. ___ Be sure baffles, effluent screen, pumps and other components are inspected when the tank is pumped. ___ Install risers on the manhole covers to allow easier access. Insulate the cover and secure tightly. ___ An effluent screen will prevent most solids from reaching the soil treatment area. Install and clean according to manufacturer recommendations. ___ Never use additives. The cleaners are harmful to your system. They do not replace good management practices. Starters and feeders are not effective. ___ Warning: NEVER go into a septic tank—there are dangerous gases and no oxygen! ___ Do not ignore alarms—troubleshoot the problem. 	<p>Functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Soil organisms destroy pathogens (bacteria, viruses). ___ Remove phosphorus, reduce nitrogen content. ___ Recycle clean water into the soil and ground water. Water and nutrients enter the ground water, evaporate through plants, and are used by plants. <p>Best management practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Maintain vegetative cover (turf grass, native grasses, flowers). Mow, but do not fertilize, burn or over-water. ___ Keep all vehicles, bikes, snowmobiles, etc. off. ___ Do not plant trees or shrubs near drainfield. ___ Inspect for cracked, missing inspection pipe covers. ___ Follow practices to prevent freezing, including mulching the entire system if needed.
	<p>Household Best Management Practices</p> <p>Manage water use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Repair all leaking faucets, toilets, fixtures. ___ Change to low flow toilets, shower heads. ___ Replace appliances with low water use models. ___ Spread water uses evenly throughout the day and week.. ___ Re-route clean water sources: water softener, treatment unit recharge water, high efficiency furnace drip, sump pumps to separate drainage area. <p>Watch what goes down the drain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ The toilet is not a garbage can—nothing should be flushed except human waste and toilet paper. ___ Excess medications—return to pharmacy or land-fill. ___ Limit or eliminate drain cleaner use. ___ Do not use automatic toilet cleaners, disposable brushes. ___ Do not use every-use or automatic shower cleaners. ___ No hazardous waste, paints, solvents, chemicals. Use disposable paint brushes. ___ Eliminate or limit use of garbage disposal. ___ No chlorine treated water such as from hot tubs. <p>Manage product use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Minimize use of anti-bacterial soaps, cleansers. ___ Detergents: measure accurately, use as little as possible. ___ Limit use of bleach-based cleansers.

Septage—the solids from the tank are usually land-applied. Lime is added in the truck to destroy pathogens and help control odors. Septic pumpers must follow strict guidelines to protect public safety and water quality. Septage disposal is managed by the MN Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

For more information: Order the [Septic System Owner's Guide](#).