

Do-It-Yourself Septic System Evaluation

- ◆ Would you like to save money by performing proper maintenance of your septic system?
- ◆ Does your septic system protect your family's health?
- ◆ Does it protect your drinking water resources and the environment?



- For your personal use ONLY-

Find out if your septic system is treating your sewage.

- 1. Discover your septic system's condition**
- 2. Determine how well you use and take care of it**
- 3. Learn how you can improve your sewage treatment**

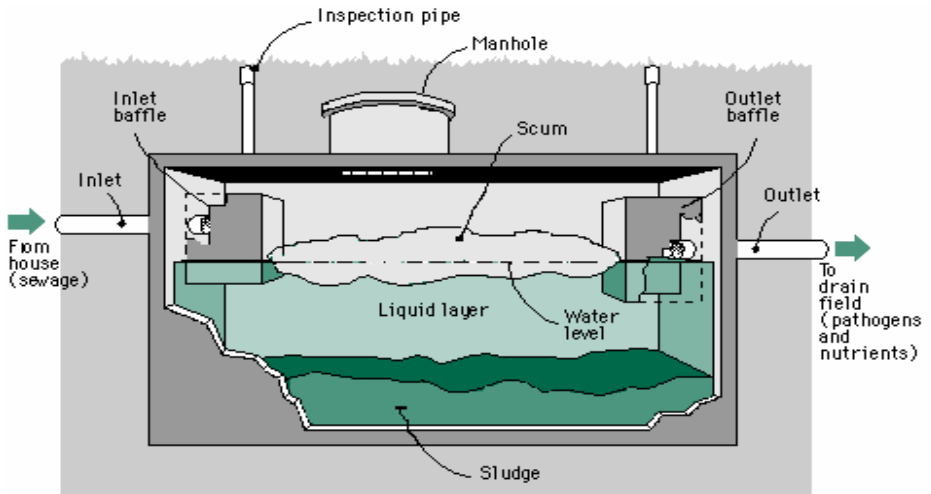
The results of this evaluation are for your personal use only. This does not substitute for a formal inspection and does not certify compliance. Certification can only be done by your local government or licensed professional.

Thank you for taking time to help protect southeast Minnesota's valuable water resources. Please proceed!

Section One: Your System's Condition

1) Where does your household water go once you have used it? *(Check only one)*

A. A water-tight concrete, plastic, or metal septic tank.



(go to #2)

B. **Cesspool/drywell/seepage pit**- a concrete block tank or a tank without a solid bottom and/or perforated side-walls. This does not provide acceptable treatment. You need to install a proper treatment system.



Did you know?

Cesspools or drywells are prohibited from being installed in Minnesota!

(go to # 2)

C. ___ **Holding tank**- a tank that stores the water until a pumper hauls it away. Emptying this tank to a ditch or other surface area is illegal and poses a significant human and environmental health hazard. In rare situations a holding tank may be the only acceptable alternative. Used on a daily basis this can become very expensive and you may wish to invest in a more complete treatment system. Have your pumper periodically check the tank.

(go to Operation & Maintenance Guidelines for Holding Tanks on the bottom of page 9)

D. ___ **Discharges directly to yard, ditch, other**- this is a threat to your family's health and the environment. You need to install a proper treatment system, then review your operation and maintenance best management practices.



(go to # 2)

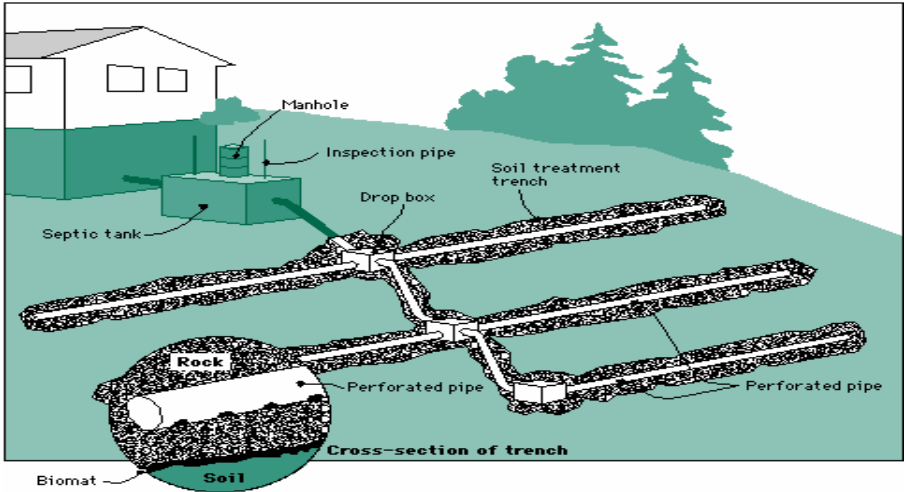
E. ___ **Don't know**- wastewater treatment is your responsibility- find a professional to help you determine what you have.

(go to # 2)

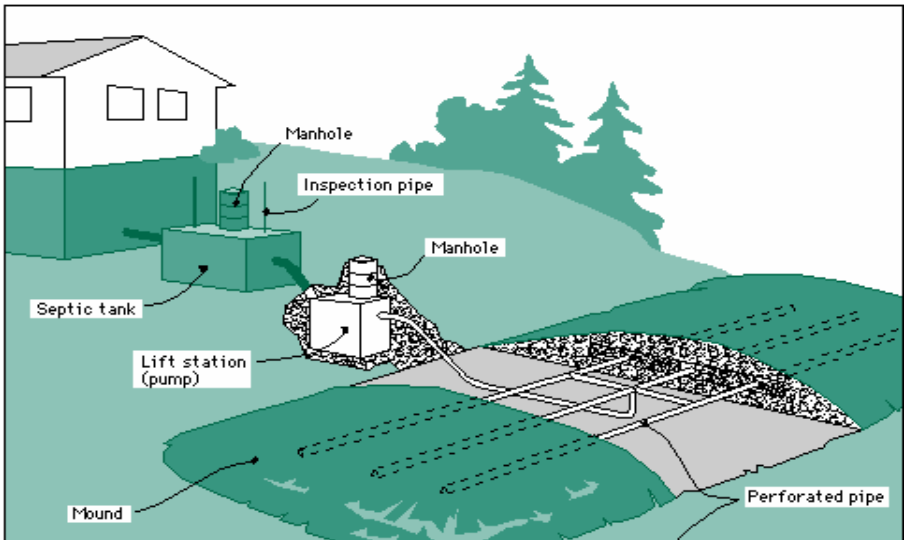
2) **Where does the liquid go when it leaves your tank?**

(Check only one)

A. **Drainfield field trenches or seepage bed-** a licensed professional can determine if your soil conditions are suitable for proper treatment.

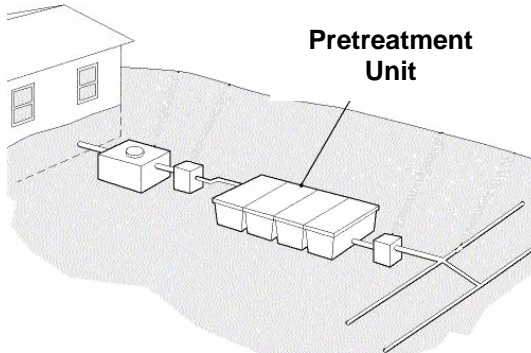


B. **Second tank to a mound.**



(go to # 3)

- C. ___ **Pre-treatment unit**- sand or peat or textile filter; aerobic treatment tank or other "pretreatment" unit. These are additional treatment steps before the water is pumped to a drainfield field trench, mound or bed.



A pretreatment device reduces the amount of work the soil must do to properly treat the water before it enters the seasonally high water table. For this reason, some local government units allow a reduced size drain field or a lower vertical separation requirement. These technologies cost more and require more maintenance.

(go to # 3)

- D. ___ **Cesspool/drywell/seepage pit**- a concrete block tank or a tank without a solid bottom and/or perforated side-walls. This is a threat to your family's health and the environment. You need to install a proper treatment system and follow operation and maintenance best management practices.



(go to # 3)

- E. ___ **Field drainage tile, ditch, stream or other outlet-** this is a threat to public health and the environment . You need to install a proper treatment system and follow operation and maintenance best management practices.



(go to # 3)

- F. ___ **Don't know-** wastewater treatment is your responsibility- find a professional to help you determine what you have.
(go to # 3)

3) Does your system ever back up in your house?

A. ___ **No** *(go to # 4)*

B. ___ **Yes-** this is a serious threat to your family's health. Have your system evaluated as soon as possible.

(go to # 4)

4) **Is the ground around your septic tank, drainfield, mound, or bed ever wet or soggy?**

A. ___ **No**- please proceed on to the Operation and Maintenance Guidelines on the next page to find out how to protect your family's health and the environment.

B. ___ **Yes**- this is a serious threat to your family's health. Have your system evaluated as soon as possible.



Scoring:

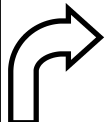
If you checked #1 A; #2 A, B, or C; #3 A; and #4 A, you have a system that appears to meet acceptable standards for treatment.

Performing proper operation and maintenance will prolong the life of your septic system and protect your investment.

If you answered any other way, it is likely that your septic system is **not providing proper treatment.**

Repairing or replacing your septic system will protect your family's health and your valuable water resources.

How well do you take care of your septic system?



Section Two: **Operation & Maintenance Guidelines**

By following these “best management practices” you protect your family’s health, the environment, and septic system investment.

Most practices are free and easy!

Check all practices that you follow

1) Household water and product use:

- _____ Repair all water leaks in a timely manner.
- _____ Limit water use- use low-flow toilets, shower heads, and clothes washers.
- _____ Don’t overload the system with water- spread water use out throughout the day and week.
- _____ Minimize the use of harsh cleaners, bleaches, and detergents.
- _____ Do not dispose of hazardous wastes, paints, solvents, or medications in the septic system.
- _____ Do not discharge the water softener, iron filter, and other clean water using devices to the septic system (*laundry water is not clean water*).

2) Septic tank:

- _____ Pump your septic tank every 1 to 3 years.
- _____ Always pump the septic tank through the manhole (to facilitate pumping, the manhole lid may need to be raised to or close to the ground surface).
- _____ Do not use septic tank additives.
- _____ Inspect the tank at time of pumping to see that it is water tight and the baffles are in place.

3) Soil treatment unit- drainfield trenches, mound, bed:

_____ If you mow the grass on your soil treatment area, mow until September 15th, then let grass grow as insulator.

_____ Do not fertilize or water over this area.

_____ Keep livestock and heavy vehicles (cars, tractors, trucks, snowmobiles, etc.) off the system.

_____ Do not have trees and other deep-rooted plants within 10-15 feet of these areas.

_____ Do not have buildings, patios, gardens, or additional soil over these areas.

_____ Total Practices Followed

Rate Yourself:

_____ **15** Perfect- consult the Septic System Owner's Guide for additional practices. *(See Page 10)*

_____ **11-14** There are opportunities for improvement!

_____ **10 and under** Following more of these "best management practices" will save you money and protect your family's health and drinking water!

Holding Tank Operation & Maintenance Guidelines:

- Minimize water use.
- Install an alarm to alert you when the tank needs pumping.
- Don't dispose of hazardous wastes, paints, and solvents in the tank.
- Use a licensed pumper and have him/her pump your tank when it is full.

Thank you for completing the Do-It-Yourself Septic System Evaluation and ***please complete and return the enclosed response card.***

Section Three: Resources Available

How can I pay for a septic system?

- Call your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to see if you are eligible for the Ag BMP Program. This program offers low-interest loans for septic system upgrades.
- Some counties also offer low-interest loans that can be assessed to your property taxes. Contact your county offices for more information (see list on next page).

How do I hire a qualified professional?

- A state-wide list is available at:
<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/programs/ists/ists.xls>
- Contact your county staff members who are trained to identify the needs of septic systems. Many counties have a list of qualified professionals working in your area.
- Consult your phone book.

Where can I find more information about septic systems and proper maintenance guidelines?

- Online at: <http://septic.umn.edu>
- Order the U of MN Extension Service publication-
"Septic System Owner's Guide".
(call 800-876-8636 or at order@extension.umn.edu)

County Septic System Specialists

<p>DODGE COUNTY Sandy Schaefer Environmental Quality 22 6th St. East, Dept. 391 Mantorville, MN 55955-2230 507-635-6273</p>	<p>OLMSTED COUNTY Dennis Manning Inspections Division Supervisor 2122 Campus Dr. SE Rochester, MN 55904 507-285-8342</p>
<p>FILLMORE COUNTY Norman Craig Zoning Administrator PO Box 655 Preston, MN 55965 507-765-3325</p>	<p>RICE COUNTY Jon Kruger County Planning Department 320 Third St. NW, Suite 9 Faribault, MN 55021-6145 507-332-6170</p>
<p>GOODHUE COUNTY Pam Holst Environmental Health Technician 509 W 5th St. Red Wing, MN 55066 612-385-6130</p>	<p>STEELE COUNTY Laurie Johnson, ISTS Specialist 630 Florence Avenue PO Box 890 Owatonna, MN 55060 507-444-7487</p>
<p>HOUSTON COUNTY Rick Frank Environmental Services Director 304 S. Marshall Street Caledonia, MN 55921 507-725-5800</p>	<p>WABASHA COUNTY Darrin Thompson Environmental Services Technician 107 E. Third St. Wabasha, MN 55981 612-565-5200</p>
<p>LE SUEUR COUNTY Carrie Mueller Environmental Resource Specialist 85 S. Park Avenue Le Center, MN 55067 507-357-8540</p>	<p>WINONA COUNTY Eric Johnson Planning Director 177 Main Street Winona, MN 55987 507-457-6335</p>
<p>MOWER COUNTY Bill Buckley Environmental Health Supervisor 1105 ½ 8th Ave. NE Austin, MN 55912 507-437-9564</p>	<p>WASTEWATER INITIATIVE STAFF “Non-regulatory assistance” Sheila Craig (507) 765-3896 Nick Haig (507) 333-3871 Doug Malchow (507) 280-5575</p>

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Extension

S E R V I C E

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Return Service Requested

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