

# DO's:

- ◆ Learn the location of your septic system, drainfield and reserve area, and keep a sketch of it with the maintenance records.
- ◆ Have your septic tank inspected by a licensed Maintenance Provider
- ◆ Keep your septic tank cover accessible for inspections and pumping. Install risers if necessary.
- ◆ Keep detailed records of repairs, pumping, inspections, permits, and other maintenance activities.
- ◆ Conserve water to avoid overloading the system; stagger wash load days and repair any leaks.
- ◆ Divert other sources of water (roof drains, house footing drains, sump pumps) away from system.
- ◆ Contact a professional when you experience problems with your system.
- ◆ Obtain a permit from Clackamas County for all repairs and alterations.
- ◆ Use household cleaners in moderation and follow directions on labels.

# DON'Ts:

- ◆ Enter a septic tank; toxic gases are produced in the tank that can be deadly within minutes.
- ◆ Drive, park, or do any activity that will compact the soil on top of the system.
- ◆ Plant anything over or near the drainfield except grass. Roots can damage the drain lines, and trees may shade the drainfield. Excessive irrigation over or near the system may also cause damage.
- ◆ Dig into the drainfield or cover it with any hard surface or building.
- ◆ Repair your system without a required permit from Clackamas County.
- ◆ Use a garbage disposal, compost food waste instead.
- ◆ Use septic tank additives.
- ◆ Use your system as a trash can for grease, coffee grinds, cigarette butts, diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, paper towels, plastics, cat litter, latex paints, pesticides, any hazardous chemical, or other non-biodegradable substance.

## SEPTIC INSPECTION RECORDS

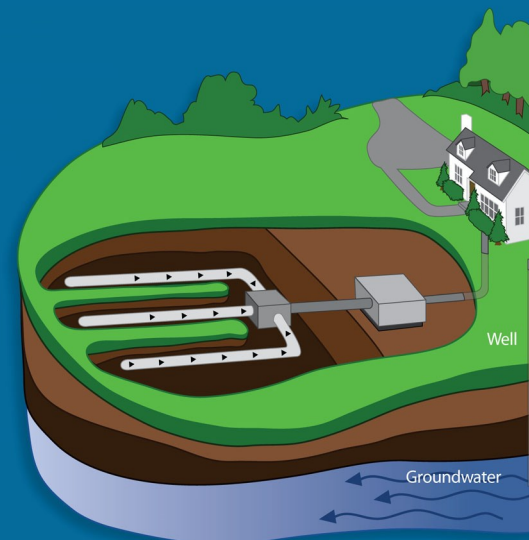
DATE	COST	MAINTENANCE PROVIDER	DESCRIPTION OF WORK



150 Beaver Creek Road  
Oregon City, OR 97045  
(503) 742-4740  
soilsconcern@clackamas.us  
www.clackamas.us/wes

# SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

*A Clackamas County guide to the proper care and maintenance of your Onsite Wastewater Treatment System*



## Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems

Onsite wastewater treatment systems (also known as septic systems) are the most common wastewater treatment systems in rural, unsewered areas of Clackamas County. Septic systems require routine maintenance to keep them functioning properly.

### How Septic Systems Work...

A typical septic system contains two major components: a septic tank and a soil drainfield. Here is how they work!

#### The septic tank:

- ◆ Removes solids, protecting the soil drainfield from clogging and resulting in premature failure of the onsite system.
- ◆ Digests a portion of the solids and stores the remaining portion. Up to 50% of the solids that remain in the tank decompose. The remaining 50% accumulate in the bottom of the tank (known as sludge.) When the level of sludge exceeds the tank's holding capacity, the sewage has less time to settle before leaving the tank. Eventually, the sludge rises to a level that allows solids to enter the drainfield, resulting in damage to the field and the need for extensive repairs.

#### The soil drainfield:

- ◆ Is located underground in an unsaturated soil area on your property.
- ◆ Further treats the effluent through physical, chemical, and biological processes. The field consists of a series of underground perforated pipes installed in a one-foot deep layer of washed gravel, synthetic media bundles, or a series of plastic chamber units.

## How Septic Systems Work... continued

- ◆ Here in the drainfield, the effluent is distributed, stored, and ultimately applied to the soil for treatment. *After filtering through the soil, the effluent enters the groundwater table.*

### Operation and Maintenance

Owners of onsite systems must operate and maintain their systems in compliance with all permit conditions and applicable requirements in this division and must not create a public health hazard or pollute public waters. *OAR 340-71-0130 General Standards, Prohibitions, and Requirements.*

Inspection is a must and pumping may be required to keep your system in good working order.

TYPE OF SYSTEM	RECOMMENDED FREQUENCY OF INSPECTION
Septic System with Gravity Distribution	<b>EVERY 3 YEARS</b>
Septic System with a PUMP to Gravity Distribution	<b>EVERY 3 YEARS*</b> <small>*Effluent filter should be checked every year and cleaned as necessary</small>
Septic System with Pressure Distribution including Sand Filters, Gravel Filters, and Pressure Beds	<b>ANNUALLY*</b> <small>*systems installed after January 2, 2014 require a maintenance contract with a certified maintenance provider</small>
Septic Systems using Alternative Treatment Technologies	<b>A MAINTENANCE CONTRACT IS REQUIRED WITH SEMI-ANNUAL INSPECTIONS</b>

During the inspection, the licensed maintenance provider will determine if all the components of the septic system are properly working, (e.g. pumps, filter, floats, pressure lines, drainfield, etc.) The licensed maintenance provider will verify the need for septic tank pumping. This will be determined by measuring the depth of septic sludge and scum in the tank.



### It is time to pump when...

If the total depth of sludge plus the scum is more than one-third of the total volume of the tank. For example, if the total length of the measuring tool is 60 inches, the tank should be pumped if the dark sludge portion plus the scum portion is over 20 inches.

### Why should I maintain my system?

**COST!** Failing sewage systems are expensive to repair or replace. It typically costs between \$3,000 to \$20,000 or more to repair or replace a failing system with a new, onsite wastewater treatment system.

### Do's and Don'ts of Septic Systems

The performance and life span of your septic system is directly dependent on how the system is operated and maintained. With proper care, a typical system should operate relatively trouble free for between twenty and thirty years or more. The list of do's and don'ts on the following page are vital to the long-term, efficient performance of your onsite wastewater treatment system.