

Properly sited, designed, constructed, and maintained septic systems can provide an efficient and economical wastewater treatment alternative to public sewer systems. Onsite/septic system owners need information on how septic systems work, how to maintain them, and precautions to take to decrease the potential for the septic system to contaminate groundwater or surface water. Operation and maintenance of the system are the owner's responsibility.

Both the septic tank and the drainfield (also known as a leachfield or absorption field) must be properly maintained to protect human health and the environment. A properly maintained system should work correctly for many years. The effectiveness of a septic system depends on how you use and operate the system. Managing a household septic system requires that you control the volume and quality of the wastewater and maintain the septic tank and drainfield. This fact sheet provides operation and maintenance tips for managing your septic system.

## Related titles

- *Understanding Your Household Septic System [AZ1158]*
- *Inspecting Your Household Septic System [az1159]*
- *Maintaining Your Septic Tank [AZ1160]*
- *Managing Your Household Septic System [AZ1161]*



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# OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE TIPS FOR YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

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# Operation and Maintenance Tips for Your Septic System

| What to do...  | How to do it...   | Why you should...   |
|--|---|---|
| Conserve water                                       | fix leaks and drips; replace old fixtures with new "low flow" types   | Extends life to your system; allows time for the septic tank to digest and separate incoming materials.   |
| Use system below or at capacity                      | run dishwashers and washing machines at other times of the day besides early mornings and bedtimes; only 2 loads of laundry a day and spread out the times between loads  | This is the primary cause of system failures...too much water!  |
| Provide good water quality to the tank               | limit use of garbage disposals; put fats and oils in the trash; put paper towels, tissues, cigarette butts, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons in the trash; use normal amounts of household detergents, cleansers, bleaches, and drain cleaners | Increasing the load of solids into the tank decreases the capacity and shortens the interval between pumpings.  |
| Additives  | don't need  | Most additives do not provide any treatment and some may actually harm the system.  |
| Prevent runoff from entering the soil treatment area | direct down spouts away from the soil treatment area; slope the drainfield slightly   | You want to avoid saturating the area with excess water.  |
| Maintain septic tank                                 | pump the septic tank every 3 to 5 years, depending on its use, size, and number of people in the house  | If the tank gets too full, particles of scum or sludge will flush out the tank. This material will clog the soil treatment area and cause the septic system to fail.  |
| Maintain the soil treatment area                     | plant grass or other shallow-rooted plants over the soil treatment area; keep vehicular traffic off the soil treatment area   | Vehicular traffic over the soil treatment area will compact the soil and may crack pipes. It can cause the distribution box to settle unevenly causing the effluent to flow unevenly through the soil treatment area. |