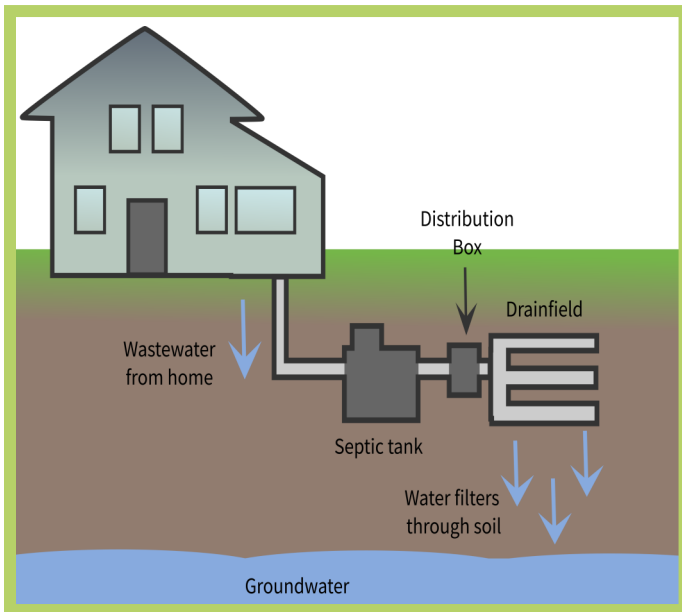


# Septic System Maintenance

Find more resources at [www.manurelink.com](http://www.manurelink.com)

## What is a septic system?

A septic system receives all household wastewater and treats it so that the water can safely return to groundwater. They are used to dispose of household wastewater in areas where sewer systems are either unavailable or not practical.



## How does a septic system work?

Wastewater from toilets, sinks and other plumbing fixtures is collected in the septic tank. Here solid waste settles to the bottom of the water and fats, oil and grease float to the top.

Naturally occurring bacteria in the tank slowly break down the fats and solids but not as fast as they can build up.

The water then continues to a distribution box and is distributed into pipes in the drain field which are surrounded by soil. The soil filters bacteria, viruses and other contaminants from the water as it eventually sinks into the groundwater below and joins nearby waterways.

## How do septic systems affect watercourses?

Wastewater from household appliances, like toilets and washing machines, contains chemicals, bacteria and other pathogens that can be harmful to environment and human health.

When a septic system isn't properly maintained this contaminated water can drain directly into groundwater. If the system is clogged or overloaded, sewage may seep to the ground's surface or back up into your home. This can contaminate drinking water or run over the ground's surface into nearby watercourses.

Care and maintenance of your system can prevent this from happening. A septic tank should be pumped out every 3-5 years. This will prevent solids from entering the drain field, which can lead to system failure. Your septic tank should be pumped out when it is 1/3 full of solids. This is typically every 3 to 5 years, but may be more frequent depending on the size of your septic tank and the number of people using it. A wastewater professional can tell you how often to pump your tank.



Pumping out a septic tank

## Where is my septic system?

If you don't know where your system is, contact your local Fraser Health office to provide you with an as-built diagram of your system.

Generally, your septic system is in your backyard with the tank closer to the home. Newer systems have access ports that are above ground. Older systems can have several inches of soil and grass growing over them that needs to be removed to access the tank to pump it out.

## Protecting your septic system

Caring for your septic system will help protect the environment as well as prolong the life of your system, potentially saving you money. Follow these tips to protect your system:

- Avoid pouring fats, oils, and grease down the drain
- Do not pour chemicals down drain and be cautious of what types of cleaners are used so you don't harm the beneficial bacteria in your septic tank
- Only flush septic safe toilet paper
- Use water efficiently
- Plant shallow-rooted plants, like grass, over your drain field because tree roots can damage the distribution pipes



## Signs of septic system problems:

- Toilets or drains are backed up or running slower than usual.
- A bad smell in your home or coming from your tap water.
- Gurgling sounds coming from drains or pipes.
- Soggy ground near the drain field.
- Unusually green, tall or thick grass growing over the drain field.
- High levels of nitrates, bacteria or other contaminants in nearby well water.

## What do I do if my septic system fails?

The [Sewerage System Regulation](#) requires that an authorized person, a Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner (ROWP) or a Professional Engineer, must be involved in the construction and maintenance of septic systems.

Find an ROWP through the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians [registrant directory](#).

A list of Professional Engineers can be found on the [Engineers and Geoscientists British Columbia website](#).

[Western Canada Onsite Wastewater Management Association of BC](#) has a variety of resources and information on their website.

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