

## Tips for a Healthy Septic System

- **Conserve Water** - Reduce the amount of wastewater that must be treated and disposed of by repairing dripping faucets, avoiding long showers, and run dishwashers and washing machines only when full.
- **Don't use commercial septic tank additives** - These usually do not help and some can hurt your system over time.
- **Restrict the use of your garbage disposal** - Waste from garbage disposals will fill your tank more rapidly, requiring more frequent pumping.
- **Don't flush non-biodegradable products** - Items such as dental floss, cigarette butts, cat box litter, and tampons are not biodegradable and will fill up your septic tank more quickly.
- **Don't drive or park on any part of the system** - The weight of a vehicle can damage the septic system resulting in costly repairs.
- **Don't poison your system** - Dumping solvents, oils, paints, disinfectants, pesticides or other poisons down the drain can contaminate groundwater and kill bacteria that help purify sewage. Take household chemicals to an approved hazardous waste collection center.
- **Keep deep rooted trees and bushes away from the leaching system** - The roots can grow into the system and clog and damage the drain lines.
- **Don't plow or shovel snow off the septic system**—Without the insulation of snow, the septic system is more susceptible to freezing.
- **Have your tank pumped regularly** - Tanks should be pumped every 3-5 years.
- **Keep a maintenance record and obtain required permits before performing any work on the system.**



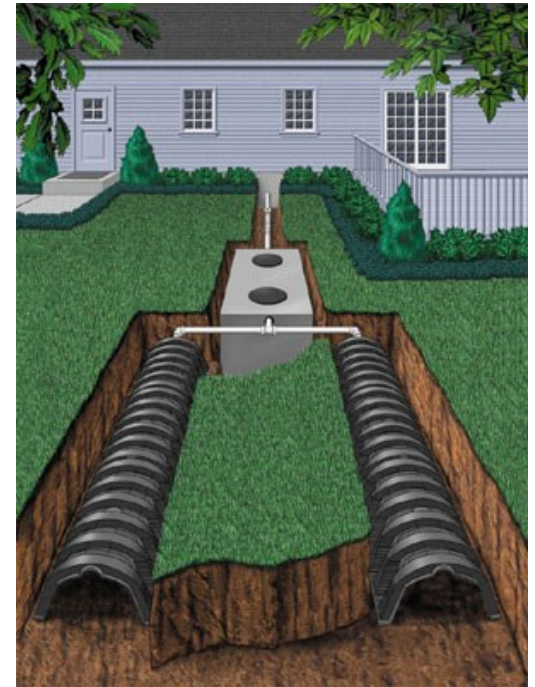
Sewage surfacing on the ground, like in the picture above, is a sign of a failing septic system.



## The Confederated Tribes the of Umatilla Indian Reservation

### Environmental Health Services

## Home Owners Guide to Septic Systems



The Confederated Tribes  
the of Umatilla Indian  
Reservation

46411 Timine Way

Pendleton, OR 97801

Phone: 541-429-7522

Fax: 541-429-7522

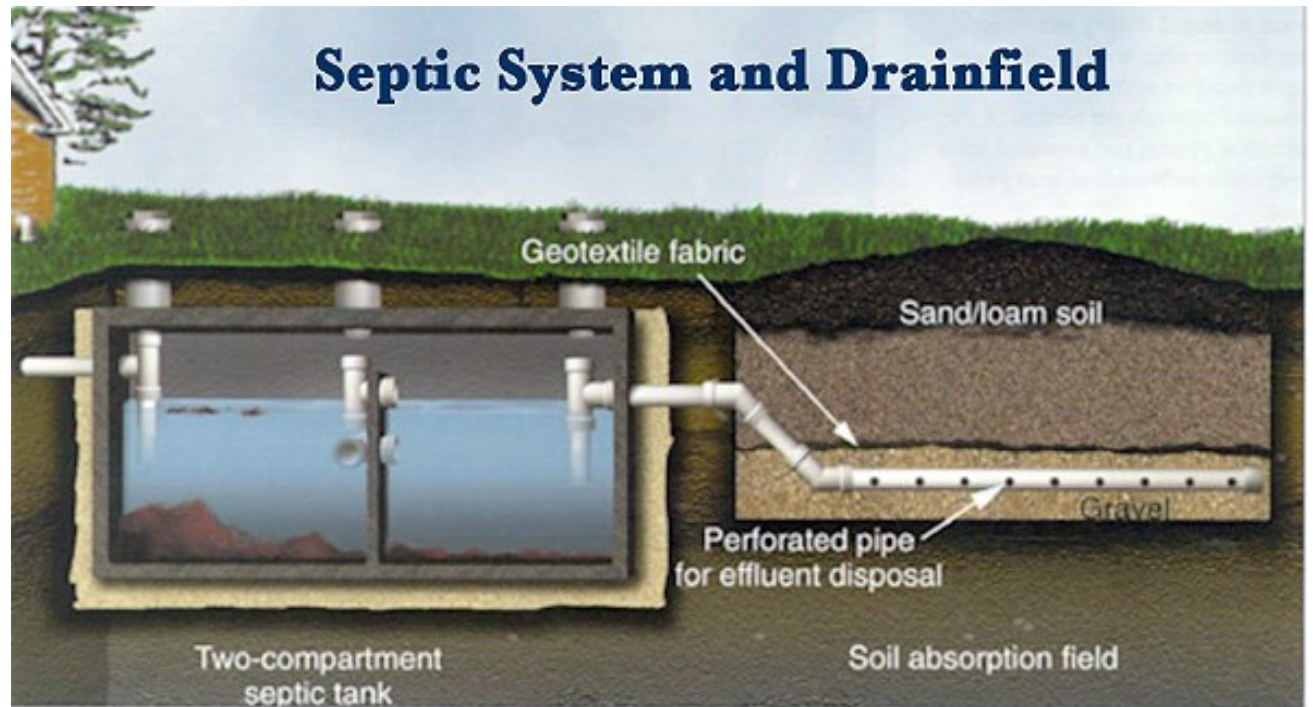
A septic system is a highly efficient, self-contained, underground waste water treatment system. Since septic systems treat and dispose of household wastewater onsite, they are often more economical than centralized sewer systems in rural areas, where lot sizes are larger and houses are spaced widely apart. Approximately 25% of all U.S. homes dispose of wastewater through septic systems.

### How it Works

A septic system contains two major components: a septic tank and the absorption or drainfield. The septic tank is usually made of concrete, fiberglass, or plastic and is buried and water tight.

Most systems are designed to hold 1,000 gallons of liquid, although the size of the tank varies depending upon the number of bedrooms in the home and state and local requirements. The primary purpose of a septic tank is to separate the liquids and solids and promote partial breakdown of contaminants by bacteria. The solids collect at the bottom of the tank in the form of sludge, and scum that floats on the top of the water remain in the tank and are pumped out periodically.

The wastewater is passed on to the drainfield which consists of a series of underground perforated pipes. The drainfield treats the wastewater through an aerobic digestion process and removes the remaining impurities before the wastewater returns to the groundwater.



### How to care for your Septic System

In order to keep your septic system working properly it must be regularly checked to prevent problems. The septic tank traps the solids in the wastewater and should be checked regularly to determine if it needs to be pumped.

Drainfields generally don't require any maintenance, however the field should be checked for sogginess and flooding. This indicates that the system may be clogged. When the level of solids fills too much space in the tank, the wastewater has less time to settle properly and too many solid particles flow into the drainfield and this will cause it to clog, so it is important to have your septic tank inspected regularly.

A poorly maintained system can result in a system failure which can cause many problems. It can be harmful to the environment if any contaminants leach into ground or surface water such as lakes and streams. It can also create health risk to your friends and neighbors, reduce the value of your property, and be costly to repair.

### Warning Signs of a Failing System

- Slow draining toilets or drains.
- Sewage Odors
- Sewage back-ups in the house.
- Sewage surfacing over the absorption area, especially after storms.
- Lush, green growth over the absorption area.