

## Proper Maintenance

The accumulated solids at the bottom of the septic tank should be pumped out every three to five years (depending on use) to prolong the life of your system. Contact your local septic system pumper for an initial pump out and inspection.

### A properly designed and maintained septic system:

- Requires minimal care
- Costs less to maintain than sewer fees
- Helps replenish groundwater

Neglect or abuse of your septic system can cause it to fail resulting in **tens of thousands of dollars in repair costs** and causing a serious health threat to your family, neighbors and even your community.



### Common causes of failure are:

- Overloading the systems with more water than it is designed to treat
- Improper disposal of liquids (chemicals) and solids (trash) into the septic tank
- Neglecting to have the septic tank pumped – full tank or clogged leach field
- High water table flooding the leach field
- Improper placement of decks, garages, swimming pools, trees near leach field or pipes

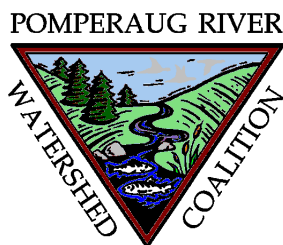
### The signs of a failing septic system are:

- Sluggish drains or odor
- Wastewater backups into house
- Squishy areas above leach field
- Lush grass above leach field

## Why are we concerned about septic systems?

The Pomperaug River Watershed is the primary source of clean drinking water for its residents. A malfunctioning septic system can pollute our rivers and lakes with weed enriching nutrients, and the groundwater from which we draw our drinking water with bacteria and chemicals.

Nearly all homes in our watershed are served by private septic systems. Private septic systems must be maintained by the homeowner. Unfortunately, septic systems are often neglected and not routinely maintained after the initial installation. Treatment and disposal of wastewater should be one of the primary concerns of any homeowner in an unsewered area.



Developed by the  
Atlantic States Rural Water and Wastewater Association  
([www.asrwwa.org](http://www.asrwwa.org))  
for the  
Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition  
([www.pomperaug.org](http://www.pomperaug.org))

*Funding to print this brochure comes through the Watershed Assistance Small Grant Program, conducted in association with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. The small grants program is administered by Rivers Alliance of Connecticut.*

Image credits: (Cover) Environmental Health Dept., Washtenaw County, Michigan - [http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/environmental\\_health/wells\\_septic](http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/environmental_health/wells_septic)  
(Inside panel) Septic System Fact Sheet by Clear Waters, a partnership between CT Sea Grant and CT NEMO - <http://www.cag.uconn.edu/ces/sustainability/pdf/cleanwater/cwfact3.pdf>

# What's in Your Yard?

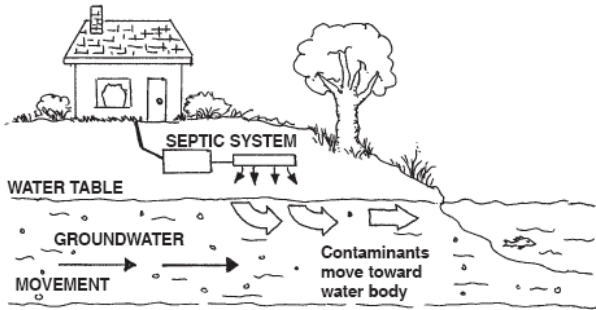
**When you flush your toilet, or pour something down your drain, do you know where it goes?**



If your home is not on a municipal sewer or community septic system, your wastewater probably goes into an on-site sewage disposal system, commonly called a septic system. A septic system is designed to collect, treat and dispose of wastewater on site so that it can percolate into the ground without contaminating ground or surface waters. In Connecticut, nearly 40% of homes use some form of on-site sewage disposal system to treat and dispose of household wastewater.

## Septic System Basics

When properly designed, installed and maintained, septic systems can actually treat wastewater so it meets drinking water standards. They also replenish groundwater and they are cost effective. All septic systems need regular maintenance. It is much less expensive to keep them operating properly through regular inspections and pumping than it is to replace them when they fail. With proper care a conventional septic system can last at least 20 years or longer.



**The Septic Tank** separates solids from liquids before sending wastewater to the leach field. A layer of sludge settles at the bottom and a layer of scum forms at the top, so only the clearest wastewater goes into the ground. Keeping solids in the tank and out of the leach field is the best way to prolong system life. That means the tank needs to be cleaned or pumped out periodically.

**The Leach Field** distributes the wastewater to the soil. They are usually constructed of two or more parallel, stone-lined ditches with perforated pipe. Liquid wastewater from the septic tank seeps into the soil and is treated by soil bacteria.

## Septic System Dos & Don'ts

**Do** learn the location of your septic tank, distribution box, and leach field and create a sketch of it for future reference. Your local health department is a good place to start.

**Do** have your septic tank pumped out every two to five years (depending on capacity of tank and volume of usage). Have your system inspected to determine appropriate rate for your household.

**Do** conserve water and fix leaky faucets.

**Do** plant only grass over your leach field.

**Do** divert surface water away from system.

**Do** educate household members about the proper use of your septic system.



**Don't** flush or dispose of **any** solids other than human waste and toilet paper.

**Don't** dispose of medicines in drains.

**Don't** dispose of fats, grease or paint in drains.

**Don't** put strong chemical cleaners in drains.

**Don't** use septic system additives.

**Don't** drive over septic system components or leach field.

## Keep a Record

Use the chart below to keep a record of your septic system maintenance and remind you of your next pump out.

Date	Work Done	Firm

## For More Information Contact

Town	Health Department/District
Washington	Washington Health Department 860-868-0423 <a href="http://www.washingtonct.org/health.html">www.washingtonct.org/health.html</a>
Morris	Torrington Area Health District
Bethlehem	860-489-0436 <a href="http://www.tahd.org/">http://www.tahd.org/</a>
Watertown	
Roxbury	Newtown Health District 203 270-4291 <a href="http://www.newtown-ct.gov/Public_Documents/NewtownCT_Health/index">http://www.newtown-ct.gov/Public_Documents/NewtownCT_Health/index</a>
Woodbury	Pomperaug Health District 203-266-4785 (Woodbury)
Southbury	203-264-9616 (Southbury) <a href="http://pomperaughealthdistrict.org/">http://pomperaughealthdistrict.org/</a>
Middlebury	Middlebury Health Department 203-577-4011