

## Other Maintenance Practices

Emptying the septic tank is very important, but not the only concern in maintaining a septic system.

To avoid filling the septic tank prematurely, non-biodegradable items such as sanitary napkins, cigarette filters, disposal diapers, cat litter, paper towels, condoms, etc., should not be flushed down sinks or the toilet.

Garbage disposal units add a large amount of solids to the waste water flow and should not be used unless the system was specifically designed for garbage disposal (If you don't know, you should assume that the system was not designed for garbage disposal.)

Fix all leaking plumbing fixtures. Even a small drip can add many gallons of water to the system load. Toilets are often the source of small leaks and care should be taken to keep them in good repair. Keep roof drains and other sources of storm run-off directed away from the site of the system. The additional water can result in a malfunction.

Keep the system site free of other construction, including buildings, driveways, patios, etc. Covering the system limits the exchange of gases within the system and reduces its performance.

Do not use illegal septic tank cleaners that include trichloroethane, trichlorethylene, tetrachloroethylene, methylene chloride, carbon tetrachloride, benzene, toluene, naphthalene, or other similar compounds. Use of these chemicals can result in significant ground water contamination and make your own water supply unsafe. It can also result in legal action against you. Do not flush toxic substances, such as, motor oil, oil-based or acrylic paints, varnishes, photographic solutions, pesticides, paint thinners, solvents, etc, down sinks or toilets.

## Fixing a System Malfunction

You may currently be facing the problem of a malfunctioning septic system. If that is the case, you are strictly limited by state law on how the problem can be corrected. You can have the septic tank emptied by a licensed septic tank cleaning company on a more frequent basis. You cannot alter, repair or replace the system without the approval of this department. This department will require that you comply with state regulations regarding repairs. Generally, the first step is to contact a licensed professional engineer for an evaluation of the problem and to design a repair. This department must approve an application for a repair permit before any construction can start.

If you have questions regarding your system, contact the Camden County Department of Health and Human Services, Water Quality Unit at (856) 374-6064.

Additional information on septic systems is available on the Internet at the following sites:

- \*[www.state.nj.us/dep/dwq/sep\\_intro.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dwq/sep_intro.htm)
- \*[www.state.nj.us/dep/dwq/sep\\_site.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dwq/sep_site.htm)
- \*[www.state.nj.us/dep/dwq/septicmn.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dwq/septicmn.htm)
- \*[www.state.nj.us/dep/index.html](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/index.html)
- \*[www.nesc.wvu.edu](http://www.nesc.wvu.edu)

### Camden County Health Department of Health and Human Services Division of Environmental & Consumer Health Services Water Quality Unit

512 Lakeland Road, Suite 301  
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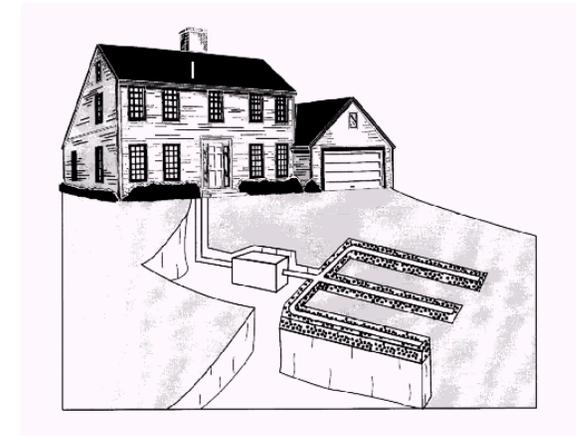
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# Homeowner's Manual for Septic Systems



**Camden County  
Department of Health &  
Human Services**

**Division of Environmental &  
Consumer Health Services**

## Introduction

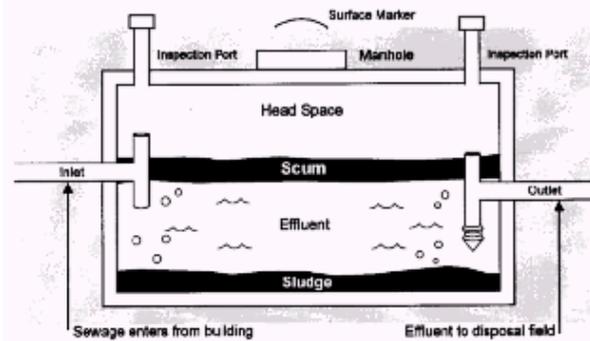
This brochure is intended for owners of individual sewage disposal systems. Individual sewage disposal systems, commonly referred to as “septic systems”, provide a means of sewage disposal in areas not served by public sewer lines. Malfunctioning septic systems are a threat to the health and safety of Camden County residents. Malfunctions can result in the back up of sewage into buildings and seepage of sewage on to the ground surface or into a stream. A malfunctioning system will reduce the resale value of the property it serves. The owner of a malfunctioning system is in violation of state and local codes and can be fined up to \$2,500 per day for each day that a system malfunctions. Proper maintenance is essential to keep a septic system from malfunctioning. Ignoring proper maintenance until a system malfunctions can make major repairs, often costing \$10,000 or more, unavoidable. Proper maintenance is relatively inexpensive and takes only a small amount of time.

*The following information will help individual sewage disposal system owners avoid the trouble and expense of a malfunctioning system.*

## How a Septic System Works

Septic systems dispose of sewage by discharging it into the ground below the property they serve. Septic systems include two basic components—a septic tank and a disposal field. Each has an integral function in the treatment and disposal of wastewater resulting from laundry and bathing, kitchen waste and body waste. Some systems include a dosing or pumping tank as a third component, facilitating the transfer of wastewater from the septic tank to the disposal field (more commonly, it flows by gravity).

The septic tank receives untreated sewage directly from the building. This tank (1,000 gallons or more in volume) acts to trap solids, floating grease, and scum.



Sewage is retained in the tank long enough for the solids to settle to the bottom and for light matter, such as grease and soap scum, to float to the top. Baffles in the tank trap the materials at the top and bottom of the tank.

**The disposal field** is a series of interconnected perforated pipes within a subsurface bed of gravel (see cover art). The sewage enters the disposal field after treatment by the septic tank. The sewage contains greatly reduced levels of solids, grease and scum. The sewage flows from the septic tank into the perforated pipe, then into the gravel, and eventually into the soil below. The natural breakdown of the sewage in the tank and field reduces its negative impact on the groundwater below the system. Note: Systems older than 10 years may include a seepage pit or pits (a pit with holes or openings in its block or concrete walls), in place of the disposal field. The pit receives sewage that has been treated by a septic tank. Sewage systems more than 40 or 50 years old may be only a seepage pit that receives sewage directly from the building (without a septic tank). This type of system is called a cesspool. Construction of new cesspools is illegal. Construction of new seepage pit systems is restricted.

## Septic System Maintenance

Septic tanks trap solids, grease, and scum that would otherwise clog the soil below the disposal field (or around a seepage pit). By clogging the soil, the solids, grease and scum reduce the rate at which sewage soaks into the ground. Eventually, as the clogging continues, the sewage does not soak into the ground as fast as it comes out of the building and the system malfunctions—backing up on to the ground surface or into the building. Septic tanks are generally effective in trapping most of the solids, grease and scum. However, septic tanks do not work when they are filled. Solids, grease, and scum pass through filled tanks and clog the soil. In order to avoid clogging the soil, the septic tank must be emptied on a regular basis. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection recommends that septic tanks be pumped out completely at least once every three years. Licensed septic tank cleaning companies are listed in the “yellow pages” of the phone book. By having your septic tank emptied on a regular basis, you will greatly reduce the likelihood of a malfunction. Generally, when the soil below a disposal field becomes clogged, the only effective means of repair is the construction of a new disposal field. Since the cost of a new disposal field runs into the thousands of dollars, the money paid to empty the septic tank is wisely spent. Note: Commercial facilities with grease traps should take the same care to maintain the traps by having them pumped regularly.

Septic system artwork courtesy of the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection