

Septic System FAQs

If you have a septic system you most likely have questions about it. Here are the answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about septic systems. Remember, the proper operation of your septic system is essential to public and private health, to property values and to the environment.

How do I know who is qualified to design, build or repair a septic system?

Wastewater practitioners authorized to construct septic systems in Alberta are certified by the Alberta Onsite Wastewater Management Association (AOWMA) and have a PSDS ticket issued by the Province of Alberta. Professional engineers working in the onsite wastewater industry in Alberta are certified by the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA).

Who is qualified to pump out septic tanks?

Vacuum truck operators, also called haulers or pumpers, who list themselves as sewage haulers.

How often should I have my septic tank pumped out?

Have your tank pumped out every 12 to 36 months unless advised differently by your maintenance provider.

What is graywater?

Graywater is untreated household waste water which has not come into contact with toilet waste. Graywater includes used water from bathtubs, showers, bathroom wash basins, and water from clothes washing machines and laundry tubs. It does not include waste water from kitchen sinks, dishwashers or laundry water from soiled diapers. In the western provinces, graywater must be collected by the septic system where it goes through the same treatment and dispersal process as blackwater.

How long should a septic system last?

A conventional septic system should last anywhere from 20-25 years, or even longer, if it is properly installed and maintained with regular pump-outs every 12 to 36 months.

What are some common signs that my septic system may be failing?

You smell sewage odours indoors or outdoors. There is water (sewage) surfacing in your yard (often above your soils treatment component). The soils treatment component area is frequently wet and spongy. Sewage is backing up into your house. There is a change in plant growth and algae (excessive growth) in nearby ponds and lakes. Well water tests show increased levels of nitrates and the presence of coliform bacteria.

How can I make sure my septic system lasts a long time?

The most important things you can do are to regularly maintain and pump out your septic tank. Have the tank periodically cleaned and inspected. Have your soils treatment component (dispersal area) inspected annually. Make sure that you do not put anything down your drains that will make it more difficult for your system to do its job. Paints, oils, fats, garbage and harmful chemicals should be avoided since they kill the “good bacteria” that break down the solid waste in your septic system.

For more information about the Septic Sense program and workshops in your community visit www.landstewardship.org/septic-sense/

