



# Ohio Department of Health Bureau of Environmental Health

## Know Your Septic Tank

“To improve and protect the health of all Ohioans”

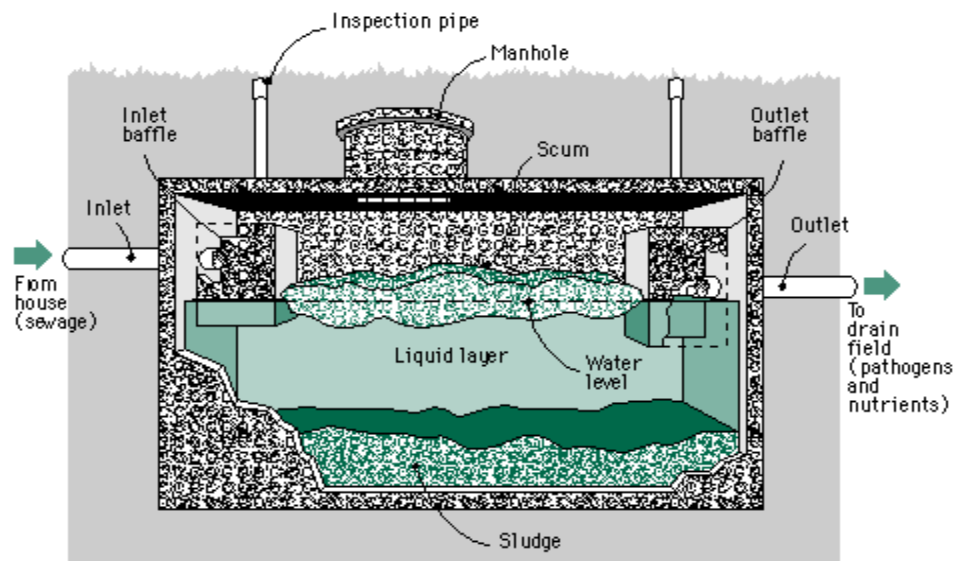
246 North High Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

www.odh.ohio.gov  
614-644-7551

Most households that are not served by public sewers depend on a household sewage system to collect and treat wastewater. Your septic tank is the primary treatment device that collects and settles wastewater from your home. Your household sewage system represents a significant investment that you will want to protect. Failed sewage systems are costly to replace and proper ongoing maintenance can extend their life. Preventive maintenance will not only protect your investment, but will also protect the environment and the public health.

What is preventive maintenance? An example is changing the oil in your car. Industry recommends that every 3–5 thousand miles that you have the oil changed. This removes the build-up of sediments that can decrease the performance of the engine. Another example is pumping your septic tank. The chart on the back of this fact sheet is the industry recommended pumping frequency rate. Pumping the septic tank removes the build-up of sediments that reduces the performance of the tank that would lead to failure of the absorption field.

- The septic tank holds the wastewater in the tank long enough for solids and liquids to separate. The wastewater forms three layers inside the tank. Sediments lighter than water (such as greases and oils) float to the top forming a layer of scum. Sediments heavier than water settle at the bottom of the tank forming a layer of sludge. This leaves a middle layer of partially clarified wastewater.



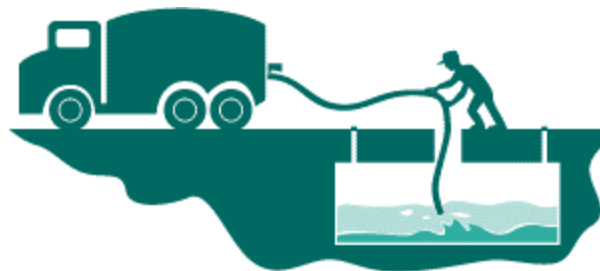
- The layers of sludge and scum remain in the septic tank where bacteria found naturally in the wastewater work to break the solids down. The sludge and scum that cannot be broken down are retained in the tank until the tank is pumped.

This publication was financed in part through a grant from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Environmental Protection Agency, under the provisions of Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act.  
An Equal Opportunity Employer/Provider

Maintain accurate maintenance records. These records will be helpful if problems occur, and will be valuable to the next owner of the home. The following chart can assist in establishing a good maintenance program.

Date	Nature of Work (Tank Pumped, Inspection, Repairs)	Contractor Name	Cost

- Inspect or have your septic tank inspected once each year. Ensure that the buildup of sludge and scum does not limit the ability to settle solids. Check to ensure the baffles or tees are in good condition. If the tank has an effluent filter, have it checked and cleaned if needed. Check for root intrusion or evidence of ground or surface water entering the tank.
- Your local health department may assist you with your annual inspection.



Many septic tank owners believe that if they haven't had any problems, they don't need to have their septic tanks pumped. If the solids are not removed, eventually they will flow out of the tank damaging the rest of the system. The following chart can be used as a guide to assist you as to when to have your tank pumped.

Tank Size (GAL)	Number of People Living in House							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
750	9.1	4.2	2.6	1.8	1.3	1	0.7	0.6
1000	12.4	5.9	3.7	2.6	2	1.5	1.2	1
1250	15.6	7.5	4.8	3.4	2.6	2	1.7	1.4
1500	18.9	9.1	5.9	4.2	3.3	2.6	2.1	1.8
1750	22.1	10.7	6.9	5	3.9	3.1	2.6	2.2
2000	25.4	12.4	8	5.9	4.5	3.7	3.1	2.6
2500	31.9	15.6	10.2	7.5	5.9	4.8	4	4

**Pumping Frequency in Years** OSU Extension AEX-740-98

- Always use a registered septage hauler approved by your local health department.
- More frequent pumping is necessary if a garbage disposal is used.
- Biological and chemical additives are not necessary, may cause harm to the system, and do not eliminate the need for pumping the septic tank.

## Protect Your Investment