

What's in Your Backyard?



If you live in South County, your drinking water comes from groundwater, whether you own your own well or tap into a public water system. Outdated cesspools and failing systems are a major source of pollution to this groundwater. What you flush down your toilet directly affects the water you drink and the waters you fish, swim, and boat in.

YOU can do something to help ensure that your water stays safe.

- Inspect your septic system regularly.
- Pump and repair it as needed.
- If you have a cesspool, replace it.

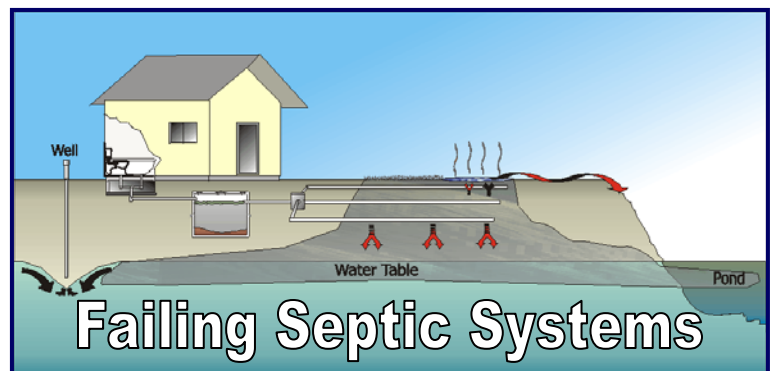


A cesspool is nothing more than a covered pit that receives wastewater and allows it to drain into the surrounding soils. This might be a stone-lined pit, concrete chamber, or leaking metal tank. Cesspools don't treat wastewater. Solids and liquids seep directly into the groundwater. This poses a threat to surrounding bodies of water and nearby wells. If you don't know what's in your backyard, chances are you have a cesspool or other substandard system if your house was built before 1970.

All septic systems need regular maintenance to keep them working properly & avoid costly repairs.

Your system is probably failing if you have one or more of these symptoms:

- Sluggish drains
- Odor
- Wastewater backups into house
- Squishy patches above drainfield
- Lush grass above drainfield

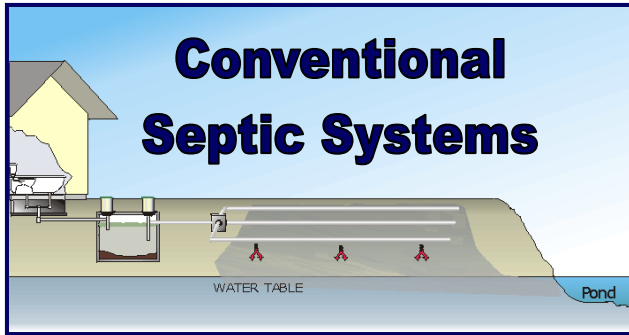


Even if you do not notice any of these signs, your system may be polluting groundwater. It is important to get it inspected. If it is failing, you need to replace it.



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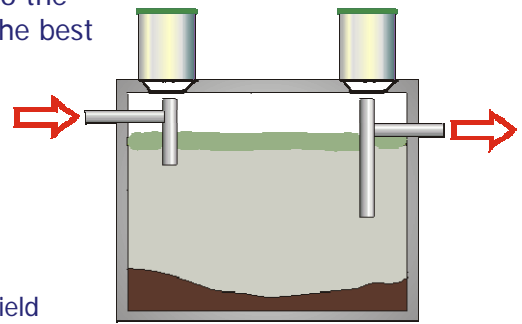
When properly designed, installed, operated, and maintained, septic systems help keep your water supply safe. They are also cost effective. It is less expensive to keep them operating properly through regular inspections and pumping than it is to replace them if they fail.

The Septic Tank

The septic tank separates solids from liquids before sending wastewater to the drainfield. 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 drainfield is the best way to prolong system life.

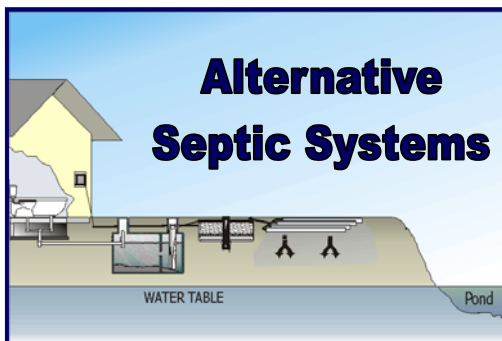
Modern Tank features include:

- ◆ Water tight tank, solids gradually fill in and must be pumped out regularly
- ◆ Access risers allow easy entry for inspection
- ◆ Low cost filters help keep solids in the tank and protect your drainfield



The Drainfield

Drainfields distribute the wastewater to the soil. There are two pieces to most drainfields. The distribution box splits the wastewater flow coming from the tank to the different lines. The lines then distribute the wastewater into the soil. Drainfields can also be concrete perforated chambers ("galleys").



New technologies are available that treat wastewater before it reaches groundwater. These alternative systems provide an extra treatment step that conventional systems are not designed to do. Enhanced treatment systems are available to treat water in even the most difficult sites and in environmentally sensitive areas.

Charlestown residents are required to have their septic system regularly inspected, maintained, and report results to the Town. For more information:

Charlestown Wastewater Management Commission (401) 364-5030
 Technical Assistance & Training, URI Cooperative Extension (401) 874-4558/(401) 874-5950