

## ***The Do's and Don'ts of owning a septic system***

- *Do pump out your septic tank every 5 years.*
- *Do know the location of your septic tank and keep records and receipts of maintenance activity for at least five (5) years.*
- *Do grow grass and small plants above system to keep drainfield in place.*
- *Don't put grease down the drain.*
- *Don't flush indigestible materials down the toilet.*
- *Don't plant trees near or drive over your septic system.*
- *Don't perform all machine washing in one day*

### **How do I know if my septic tank has failed?**

*If the liquid from the septic system cannot flow into the surrounding drainfield a sewer backup could occur and flow back into the house or puddle on the surface of the ground. Check for pooling of water or muddy soil around your septic tank or drain field. You may notice an odor of sewage near your septic system. Pay attention to your sinks and toilets to see if they backup when you flush or do laundry.*



## **Alternative Septic Systems**

Alternative septic systems are sewage disposal systems that use various forms of technology, other than the traditional septic tank and gravel trenches, to treat sewage. Alternative systems are most often utilized when site and soil conditions are not adequate to treat and dispose of sewage, such as, limited area and/or limited depth of suitable soil.

Alternative septic systems are commonly referred to as “above ground” systems; however, not all alternative systems sit above ground and depending on site and soil conditions, many can be installed below the ground surface.

Most alternative systems require additional maintenance beyond what is required for a traditional septic system. Although, pumping the septic tank (which is still a component of the alternative system) should still be done regularly. These systems should be maintained according to manufacturer's specifications.

If you have a question about maintenance for your alternative septic system, please contact your maintenance service provider. If you have questions about alternative systems, please contact the Hanover Health Department at (804) 365-4343.

**Hanover County**  
Department of Public Works  
P.O. Box 470  
Hanover, VA 23069  
(804) 365-6181  
[www.co.hanover.va.us](http://www.co.hanover.va.us)



**SAVE:  
YOUR MONEY  
AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT**

**Hanover County's  
Septic Tank Pump  
-out Program**

Important Information  
about your septic tank

**Hanover County  
Department of Public Works**



*Hanover: People, Tradition and Spirit*

## Save Money Save the Environment

Septic care is important for health, safety, and to avoid unnecessary and large expenses that occur when a poorly-cared-for septic system fails. After the septic tank system is placed in service, proper operation and maintenance of the system will ensure continued efficient service and prevent sudden replacement expenses.

The septic tank and drainfield are designed and installed to handle a limited daily sewage flow. Consistently exceeding the design flow will eventually overload the system and cause failure. The tank may receive new solids faster than it can treat them and the drainfield may become saturated from excessive water use.

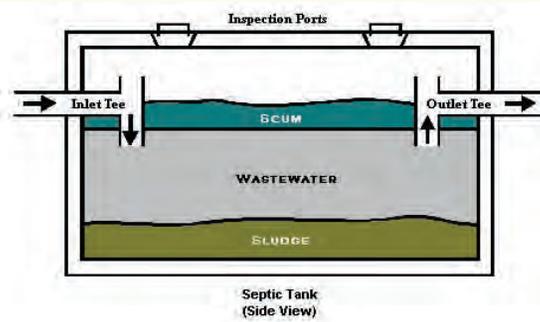
Failure to pump out a septic tank can result in solids overflowing into the drainfield, which may become clogged and stop functioning. In this event not only will the tank have to be pumped out, but the drainfield may also have to be replaced.



Properly maintained, a septic system can operate with minimal cost to the owner for many years. Periodic pumping of the septic tank is required for the system to continue to operate as designed. Improperly maintained, a septic system can fail prematurely which is costly to the homeowner and can affect health by contaminating the drinking water and polluting our rivers and streams.

## How does the septic system work?

Septic systems are one of the simplest, yet one of the most efficient and effective ways to treat small quantities of domestic sewage. A septic system is composed of two primary components: the septic tank and the drainfield. Septic tanks contain bacteria that live and grow in the tanks which are low in oxygen. These bacteria convert most solids into liquids and gases. What you have in the tank after the bacterial conversion are water, gases and indigestible solids that sink to the bottom of the tank called sludge and scum that floats to the top of the tank.



Between the sludge and the scum you have a relatively clear liquid. Baffles in the septic tank prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank. The liquid travels through the baffles and into a distribution box that sends the liquid evenly through a series of pipes that lead to the drainfield. Bacteria that require some oxygen thrive in the drainfield and complete the treatment process that actually began in the septic tank. Soil also acts as a filter that removes small amounts of solids that may have been carried out of the tank along with the liquid. The sludge at the bottom of the tank must be periodically pumped out and disposed of properly. A sewer backup can occur if the sludge layer increases enough to prevent additional waste from entering the system.

## Pump-out Program *State law*

In 1989 the Virginia General Assembly passed the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act which requires all counties, cities and towns located in eastern Virginia to adopt provisions of the act which provide for the protection of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. One of the provisions of the act states all on-site sewage disposal systems located within Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas must be pumped-out or inspected every five years. In addition, localities must also develop a tracking system to make sure the pump outs occur and provide educational material to homeowners.

### *Hanover County*

The State requires that Hanover County track and enforce the pump-out or inspection of septic tanks every five years within Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas. All you need to do is provide the County with your name, address and the date your septic tank was pumped-out or inspected. You can mail us the information, call us or email it to [septic@co.hanover.va.us](mailto:septic@co.hanover.va.us). You should keep your receipts for at least five years.

If you desire, you can also provide information to Hanover County documenting that your on-site sewage disposal system is not located within a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area or that you have a VDH approved plastic filter installed and request to be removed from the program. Please remember that regular pumping of your septic tank is recommended whether or not your system is located within a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area. Regular pumping and maintenance will save you money and protect the environment.