

### How does it do that?

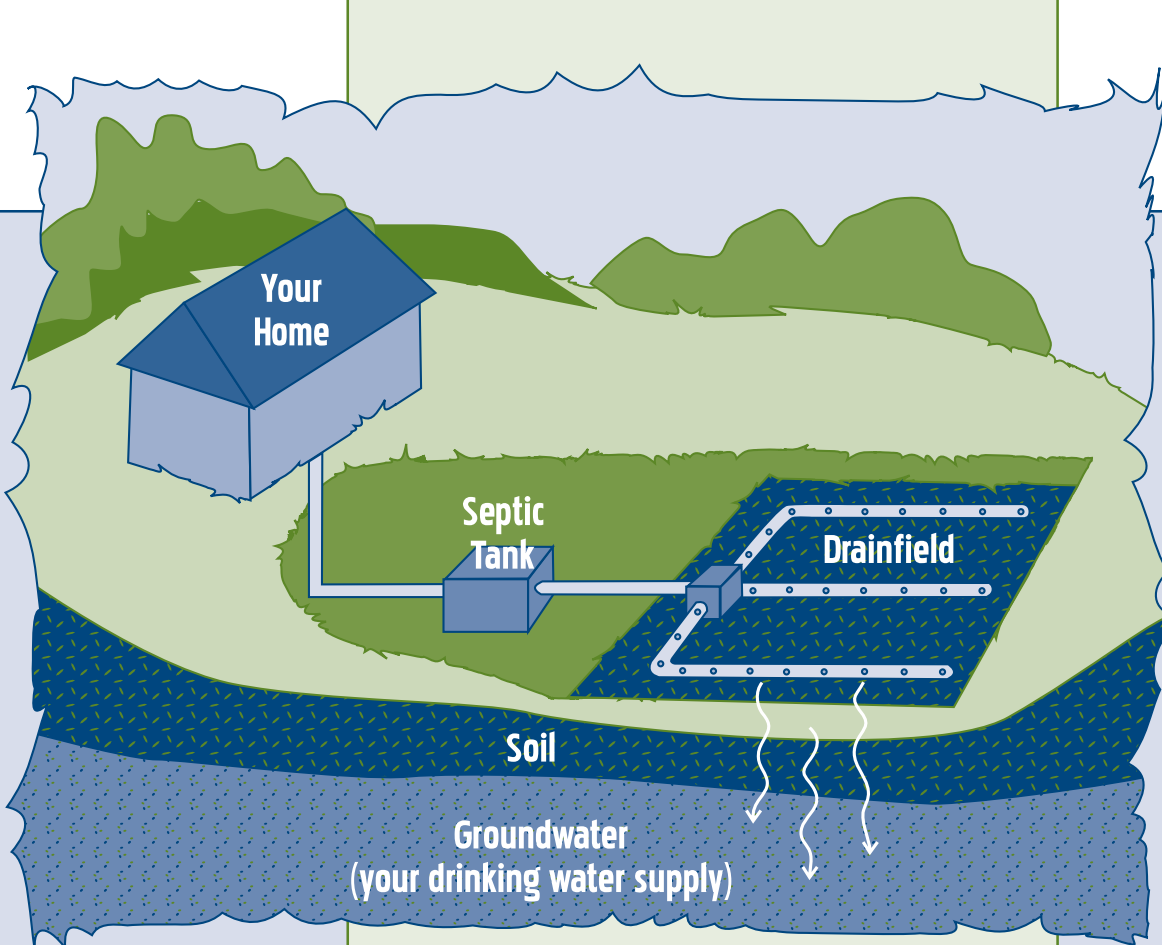
Septic systems treat household waste using:

- The septic tank
- The soil absorption field/ drainfield or lagoon

Wastewater from the bathroom, kitchen, and laundry flow to the tank, where heavy solids collect at the bottom and bacteria start decomposing the solids. Liquid effluent flows into the drainfield or lagoon where the soil provides a final treatment of the wastewater.

### What if it doesn't work?

A septic system that **does not** work can have a negative impact on human and animal health. Inadequate treatment of wastewater allows bacteria, viruses and other disease-causing pathogens to enter surface and groundwater supplies. Protect your health, drinking water, and property value by properly maintaining your septic system.



### How do I make sure it's working?

A properly functioning septic system will treat wastewater in a natural and safe way. Routine maintenance of your system will reduce both risks to human health and costs.

#### Septic owners should:

- Keep accurate septic system records (i.e. dates of inspection, pumping, problems).
- Have systems inspected and pumped every 2 to 3 years.
- Prevent vehicles and trailers from driving or parking on top of the drainfield.
- Avoid the use of additives. Save your money for an inspection or pumping.

### Where is this thing?

Try finding your septic tank by:

- Going to the basement or area of the house that has sewer pipes going outside through the wall or floor. This will indicate the direction or location of the septic tank.
- Taking a metal rod and gently probing in the soil about 10 to 15 feet from the foundation of the house. Search for pipes or some sort of a metal, plastic, or concrete tank.

Find the system's drainfield by looking for:

- Areas where grass isn't growing well, grass is greener, or it grows faster.
- Areas where there is a slight depression or mound.
- Areas where the soil is soggy when the rest of the yard is dry.

Once you locate your system draw a simple map of the location to keep in your records. To prevent future malfunctions you may want to install a fence around the drainfield area.

If you **DO NOT** receive a sewage bill, then you own a septic system.

### Do I smell something?

#### Signs of a failing system are:

- Sewage in the yard.
- A foul smelling, blackish/grayish liquid in the drainfield area.
- Sewage backup in sinks, toilets, showers, and bath tubs.

### Can septic systems affect communities?

- Septic systems are considered the 2<sup>nd</sup> most frequent source of groundwater pollution by state agencies.  
*U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Water Quality Inventory Report to Congress (305(b) Report), 1998*
- Almost 10,000 water body impairments are due to pathogen or nutrient contamination. Septic systems are contributors of these contaminants.

*U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1998 Section 303(d) List Fact Sheet: National Picture of Impaired Waters Highlights of the 1998 303(d) Lists (based on Tracking System data available 04/06/00)*



### What else should I know?

#### On the web

- University of Nebraska  
<http://wastewater.unl.edu>
- University of Minnesota  
<http://septic.umn.edu>
- National Environmental Services Center  
<http://www.nesc.wvu.edu>

### Sponsors

The Groundwater Foundation is an international nonprofit organization based in Lincoln, Nebraska dedicated to educating the public about the nature and value of groundwater. For more information about The Groundwater Foundation and its programs, visit [www.groundwater.org](http://www.groundwater.org) or call 1-800-858-4844.



Funding provided by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, the Nebraska Health Care Cash Fund and the Nebraska Drinking Water State Revolving Fund through the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality Source Water Protection Program. Additional support provided by the Water Systems Council.

# Handle It.



## Maintain Your Septic. Protect Your Health.

### Maintain my what?

A septic system is an on-site structure that treats household waste with a septic tank and a soil absorption system. Failing septic systems can contaminate lakes, creeks, and shallow drinking water supplies.