

What to do

- Get to know your septic tank: where it discharges and whether you have a soakaway fitted.
- Check all parts of your septic tank regularly.
- Ensure access points are secure and in good working order.
- Monitor your water usage to prevent your septic tank over-filling and untreated sewage being pumped through the system.
- Keep a record of your system, when it was last emptied, its location, layout, age and size. This will be useful for any maintenance issues and may be passed on to new owners of your home.
- If in doubt, consult a licensed contractor and have your system checked.

What to use

- Look out for products that are 'suitable for septic tanks' and 'environmentally friendly'. These products will have less of an impact on the bacterial processes within your tank, helping it run more efficiently.
- Look for products that are low in phosphates. Phosphates are major pollutants of watercourses - septic tanks are unable to remove them.
- Use a sink strainer to prevent excess food waste reaching your septic tank as it increases sludge build up and emptying costs.

What to avoid

- Avoid using cleaning products which kill bacteria, as these are essential for a septic tank to work.
- Do not connect rainwater drainage to your system, as untreated effluent can get pumped through and block the soakaway.
- Avoid pouring oil, grease and fat down your drains as they do not break down in small systems and can cause blockages.
- Avoid the use of disinfectants, bleaches, drain cleaner and do not pour solvents, pesticides, medicines and paint down your drain.
- Try to avoid having a 'wash day'. If you spread your clothes washes throughout the week the impact on your system will be reduced.
- Do not dispose of fabrics, sanitary waste, nappies or kitchen towels into your wastewater system as they can cause blockages and do not break down easily in the tank.

Useful Information

Emptying and Servicing Your Tank

To find a suitable waste disposal contractor in your area search the Yellow Pages under:

- **Septic Tank Services**
- **Drain and Pipe Cleaning**
- **Sewage Consultants**

Contractors should be registered with the Environment Agency

Information on Managing Your Tank

British Water

www.britishwater.co.uk and click on 'Publications' to download technical guides and fact sheets to help you manage your tank.

Environment Agency

Customer service number: 03708 506506

www.environment-agency.co.uk and search for PPG 4



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Getting to know your SEPTIC TANK

How the system works

Ways to monitor the system

Tips to keep the system running efficiently



A well-managed septic tank reduces the risk of contamination to watercourses, providing a healthier environment for your household.

YOUR WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM

SINKS

TOILETS

DISHWASHER

WASHING
MACHINE

inlet pipe

inspection
chamber

drainage field (soakaway)

5 Key Steps to Maintaining a Happy Tank & Healthy Environment

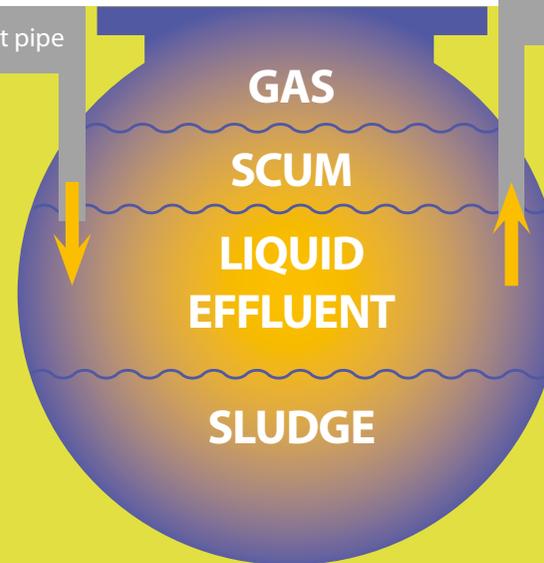
- Have your tank emptied (desludged) regularly (every 1-2 years) with a licensed contractor.
- Check your system – the effluent should be relatively clear and odour-free.
- Maintain a healthy bacterial community by using cleaning products and detergents in moderation and products that are 'suitable for septic tanks'.
- Avoid putting anything hazardous down your drains.
- If you have a problem with your system always consult a licensed contractor.

How to Locate Your Septic Tank

- Usually downhill from the property - look out for a metal or concrete lid.
- If you are new to the property, check the title deeds or ask your landlord.
- You may share the system – check with your neighbours.
- Ideally it should not be within 10m of a water-course or 50m of a bore hole, spring or well.

Do I Need to Register My Tank/System?

Visit www.environment-agency.co.uk
or call 03708 506506 for latest information



How a Septic Tank Works

- Wastewater from your property goes into the septic tank or sewage treatment plant.
- The heavier substances sink to the bottom of the tank, separating from the liquid.
- A septic tank is home to a living ecosystem where helpful bacteria work to digest poo and other solids.
- Oils and fatty substances float above the liquid (as scum) while gases are trapped at the top of the tank.
- The liquid effluent then drains away from the tank into a soakaway.
- Once in the drainage field the effluent is filtered through the soil and into the ground water below.



Signs of an Efficient Tank

- The effluent should be pale or clear with little or no odour (use your inspection chamber to check).
- If your wastewater treatment system is running correctly it should not smell, the drainage field should not be waterlogged and it should have little impact on your local environment.
- To keep your system running efficiently have it emptied and serviced regularly as the build up of sludge is the most common cause of problems.



Warning Signs

- Unpleasant odour from the discharged effluent.
- The soakaway may be blocked if the area is swampy, smelly or has prolific grass growth.
- Discoloured grey or dark effluent.
- Patches of visible effluent or sewage fungus (grey/ white cotton wool in appearance) on the drainage field.
- Slow-draining pipes or gurgling sounds from the drains.



Any warning signs should be acted on immediately to prevent environmental damage or risk to health.