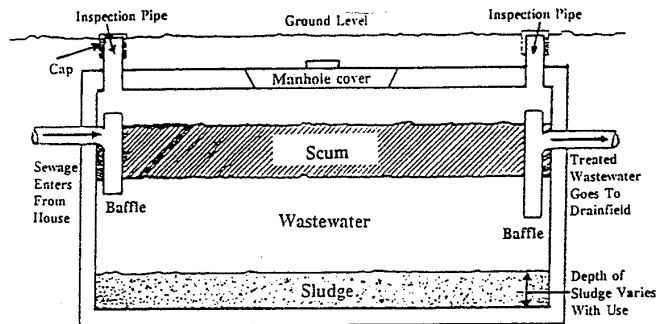


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TIPS for HOMEOWNERS #10 MAINTAINING A SEPTIC SYSTEM

Figure: Cross section of a septic tank



1. How a Septic Tank Works

The septic tank removes solids by holding wastewater in the tank, allowing solids time to settle to the bottom and scums (greases, fats, and other light weight materials) to float to the top.

In addition to removing solids, the septic tank permits decomposition of some of the solids by bacterial and chemical action and stores the undigested portion. Up to 50 percent of the solids retained in the tank decompose naturally by bacterial and chemical action.

Biological and chemical additives are not needed or recommended to aid or accelerate decomposition. They can result in degradation of the drainage field.

2. When to Pump the Tank

As a rule of thumb, a septic tank should be pumped every 3-5 years. However, the actual frequency of pumping for an individual household depends on several factors:

- capacity of the tank
- flow of wastewater (related to size of household)
- volume of solids (more solids are produced if a garbage disposal is used)

3. How to Pump the Tank

Rely only on certified licensed professionals. It is a good idea to observe the pumpout process.

- The septic tank should be pumped out through the large access port, usually located near the center of the tank. If the tank has a 6 inch PVC access pipe, this should not be used because it does not permit adequate cleaning or inspection of the tank.
- It is not necessary to use any type of chemical cleaner.
- Before closing the tank, the pump-out contractor should check the condition of the baffles or tees. If they are missing or deteriorated, they should be repaired or replaced. The outlet baffle is particularly crucial.

4. Precautions

It is never necessary to enter a septic tank. Any work to replace baffles or tees should be made from the outside. When working on a septic tank, make sure the area is well-ventilated and that someone is standing by. **(Toxic gases may be present produced by bacterial and chemical action in the tank.)**

To facilitate future pump outs, mark the location of the tank so you can easily locate it again. If the tank is covered by more than 18 inches of soil, consider installing a "riser" to facilitate future access.