

Septic System Care (23 OCT 2025)

Most information is from a Penn State Extension webinar (October 29, 2024)

Summary of Basic Practices to Protect your Septic System. Additional links at the end.

Maintain Your Septic System: This is the *most important action* to take for the health of the lake and your system.

1. Penn State recommends professional septic system inspections every three years. These inspections check the sludge level, look for cracks and leaks and check the health of the system. If you have an effluent filter and valves, assure they are clean. Inspections can catch issues early before they result in expensive repairs or cause ecological impacts.
2. Pump your tank every 2-3 years depending on use and age of the system. Older systems may need to be pumped more often because they can be more fragile and they can be more susceptible to damage from built up solids. Pump your tank if sludge level exceeds 30% capacity.
3. Regular pumping:
 - a. ensures there is sufficient space within the tank to hold wastewater and allow solids to settle
 - b. prevents sludge and solids from flowing from the tank which could cause clogs in the drainfield. Clogged drainfields can cause contaminants (nutrients, pathogens like bacteria, viruses etc) to reach groundwater and possibly the lake. Excess nutrients in the lake could cause algal blooms.
 - c. prevents solids/sludge from accumulating to levels that back up into the home.

Caution: Protect your septic system:

1. No trucks or heavy lawn mowers on leach field
2. Plant trees or shrubs at least 20'-50' from the septic system. Tree roots can damage the system. Plants with shallow roots like grass (under 6") are best.

Signs of Failure:

1. Excess plant growth over septic system
2. Water pooling on surface of leach field
3. Melting snow around septic system
4. Drainage problems in the house

Conserve Water. Lessen the load on your system. Decreasing the water that goes into your septic system allows more time for solids to settle and digest in the septic.

1. Use water wisely to reduce flow into your septic system. Install water saving devices.
2. Fix leaks.
3. Use low flow/flush toilets.
4. Do full loads of laundry and dishes; space out loads in a 24 hour period.
5. Divert rain run off and sump pump water away from your septic tank and drain field.

Be **careful what you pour down the sink or flush down the toilet**. Some chemicals can negatively impact the treatment process in the tank and could cause contaminants to leach into the ground water and/or the lake.

1. Grease and oils are extremely detrimental to septic systems. Wipe all greasy pots and pans with a paper towel to remove as much as you can before washing.
2. Avoid excess use of garbage disposal
3. Cleaners - use non-toxic cleaners
4. Bleach - bleach can kill the good bacteria that breaks down solid wastes.
5. Medicines that are not disposed of properly can harm the environment.
6. Avoid drain cleaners
7. No septic system enhancers - science does not show that they help

Below are links that will explain septic systems and septic system care:

Septic System Basics: <https://extension.psu.edu/septic-system-basics>

Five Basic Practices to Protect Your Septic System:
<https://extension.psu.edu/five-basic-practices-to-protect-your-septic-system>

Septic System Pumping: <https://extension.psu.edu/septic-tank-pumping>

Managing Your On-Lot Septic System:
<https://extension.psu.edu/managing-your-on-lot-septic-system>

PA Septic management association <https://www.pdma.net/consumer-library/>