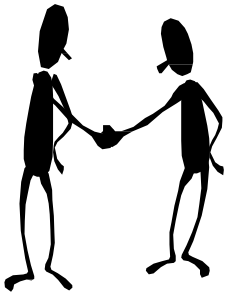
Amador Water Agency
Septic Care and Maintenance

Contrary to popular belief, septic tanks are not maintenance-free. However, properly designed septic tanks will function well for many years – as long as they were installed correctly and are not overloaded with water, household grease, or solids from garbage disposals.

Typically, septic tanks are made of pre-cast concrete. Often these tanks are composed of three or more parts: access lids, internal baffles, and filter screens. The baffles, or tees must be in good condition to keep the floating scum and grease from leaving the tank and plugging the soil in the leachfield. In addition to the floating scum, the tanks also contain liquid sewage, which eventually flows to the leachfield. Over a period of time, a sludge layer forms in the bottom of the tank. The sludge consists of the solids that remain after the anaerobic bacteria in the tank break down the solid wastes. The natural process of anaerobic digestion normally does quite well on its own, so no chemicals, enzymes, yeast or other additives should be routinely fed into the tanks.

As needed, the Amador Water Agency inspects each septic tank and takes measurements of the Scum and Sludge layers. Agency personnel will notify the homeowner when maintenance and cleaning activities are necessary.



There are several conditions that can hinder the efficiency and life of your septic system.

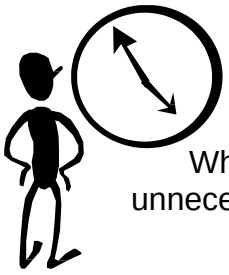
Tree Roots

Tree roots can enter septic tank systems and cause plugging. Collection lines and tanks should not be placed near trees, and trees should not be planted near collection lines and tanks.

Physical Damage

Damage to the septic tank can occur from traffic or wheel loads on the system. No vehicles should be driven over septic tank systems. No driveways, concrete surfaces or asphalt should be placed over collection lines or the septic tank.

Delayed Maintenance Measures

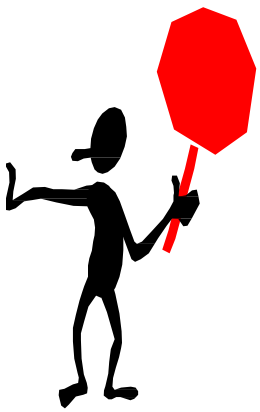


When the Amador Water Agency notifies you of a need for maintenance, have the work completed in a timely manner. Delays in maintenance will only cause damage to your septic system, possible backups into your home or business and possibly cause damage to the community system. Whether it be cleaning a filter or screen, or having your tank pumped, avoid unnecessary future costs and have the work done promptly.

Preventative Maintenance

Preventative maintenance is the best approach for septic tanks. Here are some preventative measures to extend the life of your septic system and the community's wastewater system as a whole.

- Monitor sludge and scum levels in the septic tank on an as needed basis. (This is done by the Amador Water Agency)
- Clean the screen or filter cartridge every six-months. (This can be done by a septic specialist or the homeowner)
- Minimize the amounts of grease, solids from garbage disposals, chemicals and other materials from entering the septic system. To the extent possible, throw as much as you can in the trash. Allow cooking oils and fats to cool and solidify before placing them in the trash (an old coffee can or crock works well).
- Reduce water flow into your septic system. Never empty water from downspouts into the septic tank. Direct surface water away from the leachfield.
- Plant grass over the septic tank to reduce erosion and to absorb moisture. However, do not place plants or structures over tank lids.
- Avoiding traffic or wheel loads over the septic tank area. Do not put driveways over septic lines or tanks.
- Removing trees from the septic area to avoid tree root invasion.
- Get help when you suspect a problem.

Items that you should not put into the garbage disposal, rinse down the drain, or flush down the toilet:

- coffee grounds, egg shells and seafood shells
- high-fat foods (cheeses, ice cream, cookie dough and batters, meats)
- fruit and vegetable skins
- cooking fats – this includes butter, oil, grease, and lard
- fat trimmings and skin from meats
- automotive oils and grease
- hair and wax
- feminine-hygiene products and condoms
- diapers, baby wipes, Q-tips® and cotton balls
- paper towels
- toilet paper that is not septic-friendly
- flushable facial tissues and wipes
- cigarette butts
- harsh chemicals, paints and varnishes