

What Causes Septic Systems to Fail?

Using more water than the soil can absorb is the most common reason for failure. Leaking faucets, an increase in the size of the family, or the addition of a water-using appliance (such as a dishwasher), can cause premature failure of the septic system. Saturated soil from run-off from roofs, driveways, and roads can also cause a septic system to fail. Other causes are physical damage done by driving, paving or building on top of the drainfield. Improper design or construction can also cause the system to fail. Finally, the addition of even small amounts of harmful chemicals into the system can kill the “good” bacteria that decompose solids in the system. This creates a buildup of solids that clog the perforations in the drainfield pipes, causing sewage to back up into the house.

Most failures are easy to diagnose. Check the area around the septic tank and drainfield for a continuously wet spot, or lush green grass, which indicates an overflow of septage. Other signs are sewage odors, or a rotten-egg smell around your septic system, or in your basement. Additional signs are slow draining toilets or drains; and the most easily noticeable sign: when sewage backs up into the house.

What Can I Do to Extend the Life of My Septic System?

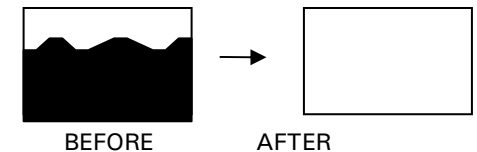
- Conserve water to reduce the amount of waste water to be treated.
- Fix leaky faucets, and toilets. If replacing fixtures, replace with low-flow fixtures.
- Stagger your clothes washing over several days, instead of doing all your washing on one day.
- Divert surface water run-off away from your absorption field.
- Know the location of your septic system, for future maintenance, and to visually inspect the soil around the system.
- Have your system inspected every three to five years (and pumped if needed), it could save you thousands of dollars in the long run.

Things NOT to Do!

- DO NOT put grease, non-biodegradable materials, oil, paint, antifreeze, pesticides, or other strong chemicals down your sink or toilet.
- DO NOT use “miracle” septic tank additives into your system; they usually don’t work.
- DO NOT drive or park over your drainfield.
- DO NOT plant trees within 30 feet of your septic tank or drainfield.

Financial Assistance for Septic Tank Pump-Out

EVERY FIVE YEARS



It's the law.
The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act requires that **septic systems** be pumped out or inspected at least once every five years.



This project received funding from the Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program at the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), grant number BAY-2007-15-PT. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of DCR.

Financial Assistance for Septic Tank Pump-Out

It's the law. The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act requires that **septic systems** be pumped out or inspected at least once every five years.

Full **financial assistance** to comply with this law is available for low-to-moderate-income (LMI) households within Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland Counties.

Applications will be taken on a **first-come, first-served** basis until the available grant funding earmarked for pump-outs is spent.

An LMI household is defined as one earning 80% or less of the

county's median household income. If you are a homeowner with a septic system and you think your household qualifies for LMI assistance, please fill out the application below and mail it, with the required proof of income*, to:

**Septic Pump-out Project
Northern Neck PDC
P.O. Box 1600
Warsaw VA 22572**

Additional applications are available at local health departments, land-use offices, and the Northern Neck Planning District Commission in Warsaw. For more information about the Septic Pump-out Project, call (804) 333-1900.

How Does a Septic System Work?

The waste water from a household flows from the house to the septic tank. The tank, which is usually cast of concrete, is the preliminary treatment phase of the system. In the tank, the heavy solids settle to the bottom, while light solids and grease float to the top, forming a scum layer. Naturally-occurring bacteria inside of the tank break down the scum layer and solids. As additional waste water enters the tank, the separated waste water in the middle of the tank is forced out (or pumped) into the septic drainfield. The drainfield is a series of perforated pipes that allow the waste water to filter through the soil, and is the secondary and final phase of treatment in a septic system. Here, the waste water percolates through the soil while additional microbes break down smaller particles and harmful disease-causing bacteria.

Full name (Head of Household)	Social Security Number
Full address where septic tank is located	Number of people living at this address
Mailing Address (if different than above)	Phone number
Signature	Date

I certify that the information provided in this application is true and correct, and that if, at a later time, it is found not to be so, I will reimburse the state of Virginia for the cost of the pump-out, as well as any legal costs. I understand that my request for LMI assistance is voluntary and that, to qualify, I must provide all the information requested above in addition to a copy of the first page of my latest tax return.

*** IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** A copy of the first page of your latest tax return (Form 1040, 1040A, or 1040EZ) or Social Security benefits documentation is required to verify LMI qualification. Income for each member living in the household must be included. Proof of ownership of the property where the septic tank is located must be provided (with a property tax receipt, for example). If the property is not owned by the applicant, then a copy of the lease agreement, or a statement indicating that the applicant is responsible for all maintenance of the property. Applications will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis until the available grant funding earmarked for pump-outs is spent.