

## ITEMS TO NEVER PUT IN YOUR SEPTIC TANK

Due to the problems they may cause, none of the following items should ever be intentionally put into your septic tank:

- Oil, fat or grease
- Coffee grounds
- Paper towels
- Cigarette butts
- Anything plastic
- Medications, especially antibiotics
- Condoms
- Feminine hygiene products
- Paint or solvents
- Industrial cleaners
- Large amounts of cleaning products
- Automobile fluids such as: gas, oil, antifreeze or transmission fluid

## CERTIFICATION

Any company that wishes to provide septage services in the state of Georgia must be approved by the state On-Site Sewage Certification Review Committee. More information and a list of certified pumpers can be found on-line at:

### USEFUL WEB LINKS

- **Georgia Department of Human Resources - Environmental Health Services:**  
www.georgiaeh.us
- **Environmental Protection Agency:**  
www.epa.gov
- **Georgia Department of Natural Resources:**  
www.dnr.state.ga.us
- **DeKalb County Board of Health:**  
www.DeKalbHealth.net

Developed in conjunction with the Metro Environmental Health Directors' OSSMS Subcommittee (Sept 2008)

## What you should know about...

### Your Septic System

On-Site Sewage Management Systems (OSSMS or Septic System) process all of the waste generated by your household.

There are two major components of an OSSMS:

- **Septic Tank** - provides storage for all solids and primary treatment of the sewage.
- **Absorption Field** - provides secondary treatment of the septage effluent by dispersing it underground to filter through the soil.

Maintenance of the tank will prolong the life expectancy of the absorption field. Failure to properly maintain your system may lead to financial hardship and create a health hazard for you, your family and your neighbors.



445 Winn Way, Suite 320  
Decatur, GA 30030  
404-508-7900

[www.DeKalbHealth.net](http://www.DeKalbHealth.net)

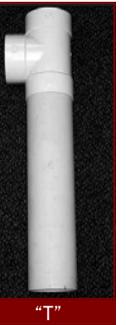
## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What is a "T"?

A "T" is a structure on both ends of the tank that directs the flow of septage. On the inlet side, it prevents the disturbance of the contents of the tank. At the outlet, it prevents solids from flowing out of the septic tank, and into the absorption field.



Effluent Filter partially in "T"  
Photo courtesy of Tuf-Tite Corp.



### Should every septic tank have an effluent filter?

A filter is required on the outlet end of two (2) compartment septic tanks. Filters are not recommended on single compartment septic tanks.

### Does a contractor need a permit to pump out my septic tank?

A certified contractor does not need to receive a permit each time a septic tank is pumped. However, if the absorption field needs repairs, then a permit must be issued by DeKalb County Board of Health, Division of Environmental Health.

### Do the lids on both ends of the tank have to be dug up and removed to pump the tank out?

Yes, it is recommended to remove both lids to ensure that nothing is clogging either "T," to check the structural integrity of both "T's," and to clean the filter in the outlet "T" if present.

### How do I find out the capacity of my septic tank?

The Division of Environmental Health's office may have a copy of the installation Inspection Report. This report should have the capacity of your septic tank and the location of the absorption field. Your contractor may also be able to determine this for you.

### Can I use too much water?

Yes, your OSSMS is designed to process a **maximum** of 150 gallons per day per bedroom. As the system ages it may decrease in efficiency. Please see the chart for **maximum** design flow and recommended water usage.

Number of Bedrooms		1	2	3	4	5
Volume	Design maximum per month in thousands of gallons.	4.5	9	13.5	18	22.5
	Recommended maximum per month in thousands of gallons	3	6	9	12	15

### The contractor stated that I had to have a repair or the Board of Health would condemn my home. Is this true?

If an OSSMS is causing an imminent health hazard, the Board of Health will ask that you abate the hazard. There may be legal ramifications for those who choose not to repair their OSSMS. However, it is extremely rare that a house is condemned. Contact the Division of Environmental Health for possible repair options at 404-508-7900.

### How often should I have my septic tank pumped?

This will depend upon the size of the tank, the number of occupants, and if a garbage disposal/grinder is present. A general rule is to have the tank serviced every three to five years, but more frequently if a garbage grinder is present. For further information contact your local Environmental Health Office.

### I had my tank pumped a week ago and it is full again. Is there a problem?

Once the tank reaches its operating capacity, each gallon of sewage in forces a gallon of effluent out to the absorption field. However, if effluent surfaces in the yard or backs up into your home, a problem may exist. For an evaluation, contact the Division of Environmental Health at 404-508-7900.

## STEPS TO PUMP OUT A SEPTIC TANK

The Contractor should:

1. Obtain a copy of the OSSMS Inspection Report.
2. Use Inspection Report to locate the septic tank.
3. Uncover the inlet and outlet ends of the tank.
4. Remove lids on each end of the tank.
5. Remove complete contents of the septic tank including the liquid, sludge and scum.
6. Check both "T"s for blockage and damage. Replace "T" if missing or damaged.
7. If present, remove and clean the filter, then reinsert.
8. Properly replace lids on both ends of tank.
9. Replace excavated dirt.
10. Provide written documentation, regarding the condition of the septic tank, including any damage or missing components, to the owner and the local Board of Health.
11. Dispose of the septage at an approved processing facility.

### RECOMMENDED PUMPING FREQUENCY

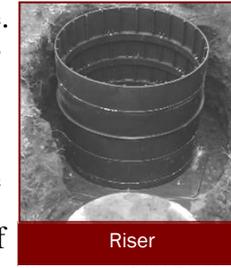
Tank size	Number of Occupants				
	1	2	3	4	5
1000	12.0 yr.	5.9 yr.	3.7 yr.	2.6 yr.	2.0 yr.
1500	19.0 yr.	9.1 yr.	5.9 yr.	4.2 yr.	3.3 yr.

More frequent pumping would be needed if garbage grinder is present

## COMMON SURCHARGES

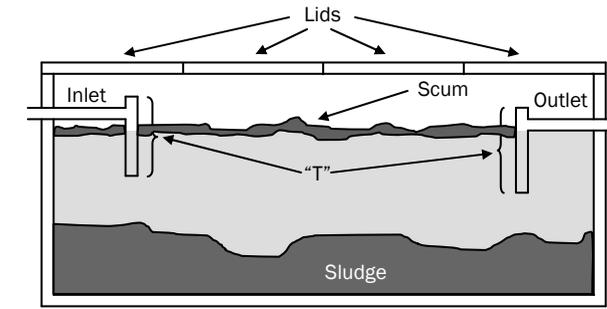
DeKalb County Board of Health cannot regulate business practices regarding the cost of services or ethical conduct. You are encouraged to research contractors and their services. Obtain several detailed quotes regarding the pumping charges, and find out if additional surcharges may be added. Surcharges can be costly. Listed below are common additional costs.

1. An additional charge may be added for each section of hose needed to reach from the pump truck to the septic tank.
2. An additional charge may be added if the depth of the septic tank is deeper than the contractor's predetermined depth. This depth may vary. Approved risers may be installed to bring access to within twelve inches (12") of the ground surface to prevent this surcharge in the future.
3. Some contractors may want to knock a hole in the lid of the septic tank and install a small access port to facilitate service of the tank in the future. Holes should not be broken in the lid of the tank and only approved risers with at least fifteen inch diameter (15") should be installed to facilitate access to the septic tank.
4. An additional charge may be added to dig-up and open both ends of the septic tank. Both ends should be opened in order to properly evaluate the structural integrity of the septic tank and both "T"s, to confirm there are no blockages in either "T" and to ensure that there is complete removal of all septage from the entire septic tank.
5. An additional charge may be added if the septic tank contains more septage than the capacity it is designed to hold. The tank is designed to maintain a six inch (6") to eight inch (8") space from the top of the septage to the top of the septic tank. The contractor would then have to pay more to dispose of the additional septage at the processing facility.
6. An additional charge may be added to clean the effluent filter, if present. The contractor simply removes the filter from the "T," uses a water hose to rinse it off, then returns the filter to the outlet "T." The filter should be cleaned when the tank is serviced, but this entire process requires no tools in excess of a garden hose and only takes a few minutes to complete.
7. An additional charge may be added for a new filter. As described above, the same filter can be cleaned and reused. A new filter should not be necessary if the original filter is not damaged.
8. Some contractors recommend additives to their clients. This may be either a one time starter application or a monthly treatment. There has not been definitive research which proves that any additive benefits a system as a whole. Please remember, your system consists not only of a tank but also an absorption field. DeKalb County Board of Health does not recommend the use of additives.
9. Some contractors recommend jetting the absorption field. This forces water, under high pressure, into the field in effort to break-up the biomat or as a troubleshooting tool. Since most problems associated with an absorption field are due to saturation, forcing more water into the field is not recommended. Furthermore, this process can damage older pipes.
10. If the "T" is damaged or missing, a replacement is required. A new "T" is composed of schedule 40 PVC or an ASTM equivalent. This should not be a costly or difficult repair.

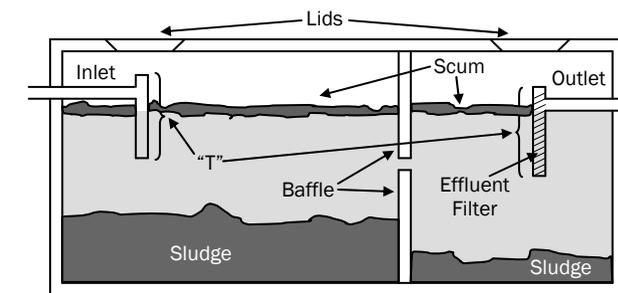


Riser  
Photo courtesy of Polylok/Zabel, Inc.

## SEPTIC TANK DIAGRAMS



Cross-section of a single compartment septic tank



Cross-section of a two-compartment septic tank

## ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS

In some cases, a lot may have marginal soil characteristics and require an alternative system. This would be approved and mandated by the Board of Health. These systems may include an Aerobic Treatment Unit (ATU), Bio-Peat or other Advanced Treatment System (ATS).

Any service to an alternative system should be performed by an individual certified by the manufacturer to do the maintenance. The individual should have a certification card from the manufacturer of that system.



ATU  
Photo courtesy of Ecological Tanks, Inc.