

There are lots of nice, small plants that you can plant around your treatment area. Just remember that you must be able to get to it when it fails. Plants that don't mind moist or wet conditions are best, such as native grasses, sedges, rushes and native ferns.

#### 4. The Toilet Isn't a Garbage Disposal

Never flush car litter, disposable nappies, sanitary napkins, tampons, paper towels, facial tissues, coffee grounds, or cigarette butts and filters down your toilet. They'll clog your septic tank in less time than you might imagine, and force you to spend money on cleaning it out well before you need to.

#### 5. Minimise Heavy Duty Cleaners

Overuse of heavy cleaners kills beneficial bacteria in the septic tank, so solids won't break down as well. Any disinfectant, antiseptic, germicide powder or any household cleaners that contain phosphates, chlorine or sodium kill the helpful bugs in your septic tank system. House hold products that do not clearly state on their label that they contain, or how environmentally friendly they are, should be avoided.

#### 6. Do Not Pour Oils or Fats Down the Drain

Grease can clog the septic drainfield, making it impossible for soil to absorb liquids. If that happens, you'll need a new drainfield, so it is a very serious issue.

#### 7. Avoid Hazardous Chemicals

Varnish, paint thinners, motor oils, gasoline and other similar chemicals can ruin your system and are a hazard to groundwater. Dispose of them properly. Other hazards to avoid include any trade waste, and any back-flush waters from a spa pool, swimming pool or water softener.

#### 8. Protect the System from Damage

Do not drive over the drainfield, build a structure on top of it, or cover it with concrete or asphalt. It is useful to plant grass on the drainfield to minimise soil erosion.

#### 9. Clean at regular 3 — 4 year intervals

As a septic tank or effluent tank is a living system that relies on a healthy bacteria population to breakdown and process all incoming solids it is advisable to carefully consider the above points.

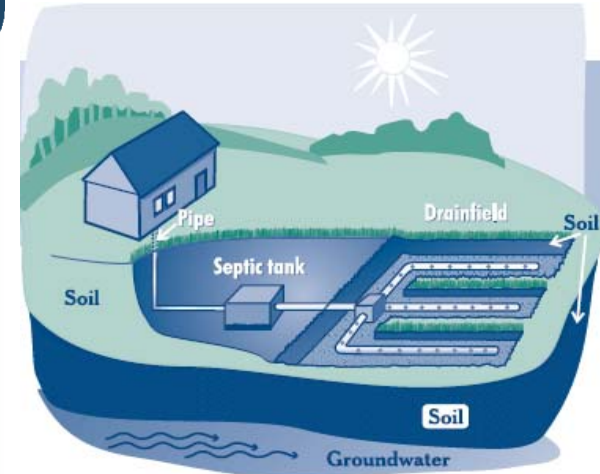
For further information, please contact Council

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Interest of Better Understanding by the  
Ruapehu District Council



Private Bag 1001  
Taumarunui 3946  
Tel: (07) 895-8188  
Fax: (07) 895-3256  
Ohakune: (06) 385-8364  
Raetihi: (06) 385-4447

# A GUIDE TO



Typical septic system

# Septic Tanks

Ruapehu  
District Council

This pamphlet tells you how you can take good care of your septic tank and how often to clean it out. It also explains what kinds of things you might be doing around the home which can damage your tank or its 'drainfield', and which can cause you to need to spend money to maintain the system.

## What is a Septic Tank

A septic tank is a tank dug into the ground which 'digests' the solid waste from toilets, baths, kitchen sink and laundry. The liquid waste passes through the septic tank to be disposed of, or further treated, and then travels through pipes out to the drainfield. Chances are if you live in a rural area you are on a septic tank system.

## Can't Remember When Your Septic Tank was Cleaned Last?

Then there's a good chance your tank hasn't been cleaned for more than 5 years! Tanks have to be cleaned every 3 — 4 years.

Solids must eventually be pumped from the tank. Many experts advise a family of four with a 4,500 litre septic tank to have the tank pumped after 3 — 5 years of full time use. Other experts says you can go much longer between pumping operations. Never attempt to open a septic tank yourself. Gases and bacteria in it are dangerous. Council recommends a clean every 3 — 4 years.

Regular cleaning every 3 — 4 years can save you expensive repairs or replacement and also helps to protect the health of your family and those who live near you. It pays to act well before there is a costly and ..... embarrassing problem to deal with! Septic tanks can become smelly problems at the most inconvenient times. The biggest problem is smelly overflows that you

don't want your children, guests or anyone else to be near.

The septic tank should be cleaned professionally by taking the concrete lid off, not by putting a pipe down a mushroom vent.

## Health Risks To Your Family

Effluent spilling onto the ground is a health hazard to you, your family, pets and neighbours. Just as you produce the waste, it is your responsibility to dispose of it in a safe manner. It is only partially treated in a septic tank, so the sludge must be trucked away and treated in a secure system such as provided by the Council.

## When the Septic Tank Fails

One or more of the following indicates a failing system and the need to take urgent action:

- Sinks and toilet become slow to drain
- There is the smell of sewage near the septic tank or soakage field
- Effluent can form a black slimy area on the ground

## How to Care for Your Septic Tank and Septic System

### 1. Divert Rainwater Away From the Septic Tank's Drainfield

A soggy drainfield won't absorb and neutralise liquid waste. Plan your landscaping, roof gutters and foundation drains so that excess water is diverted away from the septic tank's drainfield.

### 2. Don't Overload the Septic Tank and Drainfield

You can take some measures to reduce the amount of liquid entering your septic tank. Here are some ideas to pick and choose from:

- Check taps and toilets for leaks, and make repairs if necessary.
- Use aerators on taps and flow reducer nozzles on showers to help reduce the amount of water used.
- Reduce water levels for small loads of laundry.
- Wait until the dishwasher is full before you turn it on.
- The use of kitchen waste disposal units is not recommended because you use a lot of water to flush the kitchen waste away. Composting is the best treatment for kitchen waste.
- Use a displacer to reduce the amount of water needed to flush the toilet.

### 3. Keep Trees Away from the Septic System

Tree roots can cause major and expensive problems to septic tanks and drainfields. Have a look at where your tank and drainfield are to make sure no trees are growing nearby. We recommend that you keep trees at least 30 metres away from the septic system, because of the reach of their roots. Trees with very aggressive roots, such as willows, should be even further away from the system.