

ADDITIONAL PRE-TREATMENT

If, during the initial review and permitting process, it was found that your lot had marginal soil characteristics, additional pre-treatment may have been mandated by your local Board of Health. This may consist of an Aerobic Treatment Unit (ATU), Bio-Peat, or other Advanced Treatment System (ATS).

These systems provide additional treatment of the effluent before it is released into the absorption field. The DHR approved products are too numerous to list specifically, but may be found on-line at: www.georgiaeh.us.

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



Aerobic Treatment Unit (ATU)

Photo courtesy of Ecological Tanks, Inc.



Bio-Peat

Photo courtesy of Bord na Mona



GWINNETT COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH
Environmental Health Section
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MEHD OSSMS SUB-COMMITTEE

SEPTIC TANK MAINTENANCE BROCHURE

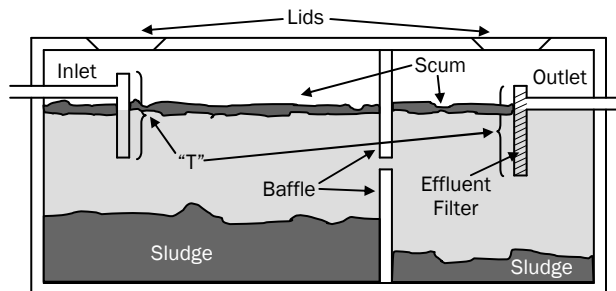
To develop guidelines to assist in the regulation and standardization of On-Site Sewage Management Systems through the sharing of mutual experience and ideas.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this educational brochure is to inform you, the consumer, about what an On-Site Sewage Management System (OSSMS or Septic System) is and what you can do to maintain your system. All of the waste generated by your household will be processed through the system. 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.

The primary focus of this brochure is on the septic tank. Maintenance of the tank may prolong the life expectancy of the absorption field and failure to properly maintain your system could lead not only to a financial hardship but create a health hazard for yourself, your family, and your neighbors.



Cross-section of a two-compartment septic tank

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a "T"?

A "T" is a structure on both ends of the tank designed to direct the flow of septage. On the inlet side, it prevents the



"T"

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.

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.



Effluent Filter partially in "T"

Photo courtesy of Tuf-Tite Corp.

Should the contractor I hire have a permit to pump out my septic tank?

A contractor, certified by the Department of Human Resources (DHR), does not need to contact the local Board of Health (BOH) to receive a permit each time a client asks to have their septic tank pumped. **However, a permit must be issued by the local BOH if absorption field repairs are needed.**

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

Your local Board of Health may have a copy of the Inspection Report from when your OSSMS was installed. This report should state the capacity of your septic tank as well as the location of the absorption field. Additionally, your contractor may be able to determine this for you.

The contractor stated that they did not need to dig up and remove the lid on both ends of the tank to pump it out. Is this true?

No, our office recommends the removal of both lids as the contractor should: 1) Ensure that nothing is clogging either "T," 2) Check the structural integrity of both "T's," and 3) Clean the filter in the outlet "T" if present.

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

If a situation is found, which is causing an imminent health hazard, the Board of Health will ask that you abate the hazard. There may even be administrative or legal ramifications for those who choose not to repair their OSSMS. However, the condemnation of a house is extremely rare and used only as a last resort. Contact your local Environmental Health Specialist for possible repair options.

Can I use too much water?

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

Number of Bedrooms	1	2	3	4	5
Vol. - design max. per month in thousands (k) of gal.	4 . 5 k	9 k	13 . 5 k	18 k	22 . 5 k
Vol. - recommended max. per month in thousands (k) of gal.	3 k	6 k	9 k	12 k	15 k

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 (3) to five (5) 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. Contact your local Environmental Health Office for an evaluation.

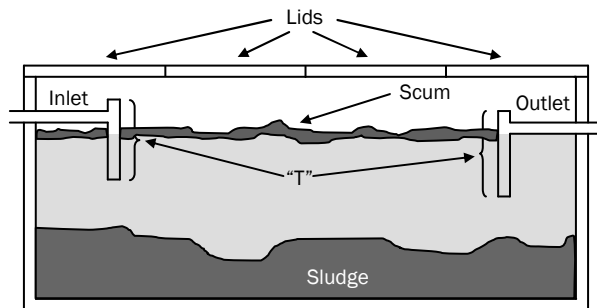
STEPS TO PUMP OUT A SEPTIC TANK

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. The complete contents of the septic tank are to be removed 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 re-insert.
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



Cross-section of a single compartment septic tank

CERTIFICATION

Any company wishing to provide septage removal services in the state of Georgia must register their company with the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR). A list of all DHR certified pumpers can be found on-line at: www.georgiaeh.us.

ITEMS TO NEVER PUT IN YOUR SEPTIC TANK

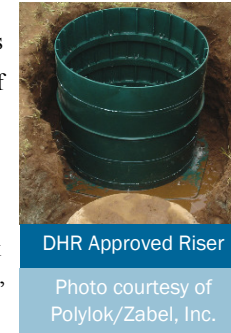
Due to the problems they could cause, none of the following items should ever be intentionally put into your septic tank:

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

COMMON SURCHARGES

The Local Board of Health cannot regulate business practices in regards to cost of services or ethical conduct. It is encouraged that consumers research contractors and their offered services. Obtain several detailed quotes regarding the pumping charges, therefore determining if there is a base price with additional surcharges determined on-site. Surcharges can be costly. Listed below are common additional costs.

1. An additional charge for each section of hose that is used to reach from the pump truck to the septic tank.
2. An additional charge if the depth of the septic tank is deeper than the contractor's "predetermined" depth. This depth may vary. 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 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 DHR approved risers should be installed to facilitate access to the septic tank. These risers should be at least fifteen inches (15") in diameter.
4. An additional charge 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", ensure 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 if the septic tank is "overflow." There should be a six inch (6") to eight inch (8") space



6. An additional charge 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 for a new filter. As described above, the same filter can be cleaned and reused. A new filter should not be necessary as long as it is not damaged.
8. Some contractors recommend additives to their clients. This may be either a one time "starter" or a monthly "treatment." Neither the state DHR nor your local Board of Health recommend the use of additives. There has not been definitive research provided 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.
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." Being as most problems associated with an absorption field are due to saturation, forcing more water into the field is not recommended. It can also 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.

WEB LINKS

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