

## Tips to Improve Performance and Increase the Longevity of Your Septic System



### Minimize/eliminate garbage disposal use

Adding food wastes or other solids reduces your septic system's capacity and increases the need to pump the septic tank.

### Do not dump non-biodegradables or grease down your sink or toilet

Non-biodegradables like cigarette butts, diapers, feminine products and kitty litter can clog the pipes. Grease can thicken and clog the pipes or reduce the infiltrative capacity of the SAS.

### Never flush toxic materials

Paint, paint thinner, polyurethane, gasoline, pesticides, anti-freeze, water softeners, chlorine, drain cleaners and other caustic or toxic substances can kill the naturally occurring bacteria needed in the tank and impair normal function of the system.

### Do not add enzymes or commercial additives to your system

These products usually do not help and some may hurt your system in the future.

### Inspect inlet and outlet baffles annually

A missing baffle will allow solids to carry over into the SAS and ultimately lead to a failed system. If effluent filters are present, they should be cleaned annually or as recommended by the manufacturer.

## System Maintenance Record

Pumping Date	Work Performed	Contractor's Name

System Installation Date:

Name of Installer      Phone

Name of Pumper      Phone

Name of Designer      Phone



## Corporate Headquarters

185 Centre Street  
Danvers, MA 01923  
978-777-3050  
800-998-3050  
F 978-774-7816

## Regional Offices

34 Chelmsford Street, 2nd Floor  
Chelmsford, MA 01824  
978-244-0110  
F 978-244-1133

315 Elm Street  
Marlborough, MA 01752  
508-460-1111  
F 508-460-1121

1 Harris Street  
Newburyport, MA 01950  
978-465-9992  
F 978-255-1249

## Divisions of Hancock

### Andrysick Land Surveying

206 Worcester Road  
Princeton, MA 01541  
978-464-5890  
F 978-464-5383

### H.W. Moore Associates

121 E. Berkeley Street, 4th Floor  
Boston, MA 02118  
617-357-8145  
F 617-357-9495

### Noonan & McDowell

34 Chelmsford Street, 2nd Floor  
Chelmsford, MA 01824  
978-667-9736  
F 978-671-9565

# HANCOCK ASSOCIATES

Surveyors | Engineers | Scientists



## Septic Systems FAQs & TIPS

info@HancockAssociates.com  
www.HancockAssociates.com





## FAQs



### What is a conventional septic system?

Conventional septic systems are individual wastewater treatment systems that use the soil to treat small wastewater flows. They typically consist of a septic tank, distribution box and drain field connected by pipes. The septic system acts as an efficient biological system that digests, treats and disperses household wastewater.

The system treats household wastewater by temporarily holding it in the septic tank where heavy solids and lighter scum are allowed to separate from the wastewater. The solids stored in the tank are decomposed by bacteria and later removed along with the lighter scum by a professional septic tank pumper.

The partially treated wastewater then flows out of the tank and into a soil absorption system (SAS). The SAS is typically a combination of perforated pipes/structures and crushed stone that evenly distributes the outflow from the septic tank into the soil for final treatment and dispersal.

### How can I locate the septic system on my property?

The location may have been provided at the time you purchased your home as part of your septic system inspection. You can also check with your Board of Health or other municipal departments to see if they have an "as-built" plan on file. Most municipalities require an as-built location sketch following the installation of a system and prior to issuance of a Certificate of Compliance. You can also check with the system installer or the design engineer, if known.

If records are not available to locate your system, a Licensed Design Professional can inspect your system, locate its components and provide you with a septic system location plan.

### How can I determine the condition of my septic system?

Ask the pumping contractor to inspect the baffles on the inlet and outlet of the septic tank. If the baffles are broken or missing, have them repaired or replaced as soon as possible. It is essential to the longevity of your system that the baffles remain in good condition. A low water level can be an indicator that sewage is leaking from the tank. If the tank is cracked or leaking, it may need to be replaced.

### How do I know if my system is having problems?

Your septic system may be having issues if you experience these problems:

- Muddy soil or pools of wastewater around your septic tank or drain field
- Sewage smell around your system or inside your house
- Backups when you do laundry, take showers or flush the toilet

### When is a Title 5 Inspection required?

A system needs to be inspected within two years before the time of transfer of title to the facility served by the system. An inspection conducted up to three years before the time of transfer may be used if the inspection report is accompanied by system pumping records demonstrating that the system has been pumped at least once a year during that time. If weather conditions preclude inspection at the time of transfer, then the inspection may be completed as soon as weather permits, up to six months after the transfer. In this instance, the seller must notify the buyer in writing of the requirements of 310 CMR 15.300 through 15.305.

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

Regular pumping helps prevent solids from escaping into SAS and clogging soil pores. While pumping frequency is a function of use, MassDEP recommends:

- For homes with a garbage disposal: once every year
- For homes without a garbage disposal: once every three years

### What is a pump system and what should I know if my septic system has a pump chamber?

A pump system is necessary for systems with leaching areas located at a higher elevation than the septic tank. The pump is used to lift the liquid effluent from the septic tank level to the SAS. The condition of the pump and its controls should be inspected whenever the septic tank is pumped. Any sludge in the pump chamber should be pumped out at that time. Once a year, the condition of the electrical wiring and the operation of the control floats should be checked.

### What is an innovative/alternative (I/A) system?

This is a catch-all term for several approved sewage pre-treatment systems that are sometimes used to overcome site limitations when repairing or upgrading a septic system. Often times, I/A systems allow a designer to reduce the size of the SAS or reduce the separation to groundwater. I/A systems are generally better than conventional septic systems at removing solids and other pollutants from wastewater before it goes to the SAS.

