

Well-A-Syst

A voluntary program to assist private drinking well users evaluate and modify practices to protect their drinking water supply

Septic System Management

Why should you be concerned?

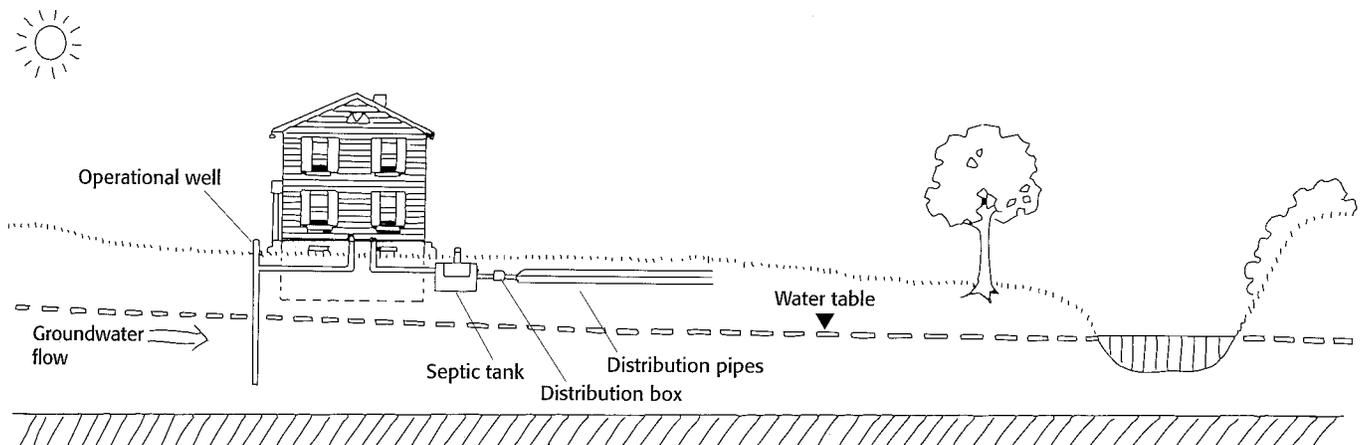
Rural residents typically use a septic system or other types of onsite wastewater disposal systems. While these systems are usually economical and safe, household wastewater can contain contaminants that may harm water quality and septic system performance.

Potential contaminants in household wastewater can include disease-causing bacteria, infectious viruses, household chemicals, and excess nutrients, such as nitrogen.

Evaluate the condition of your septic system by answering the following questions.

1. Do you have an on-site wastewater treatment system (septic tank and drainfield, lagoon)?
2. Is your wastewater treatment system closer to your well and other water sources than the local code allows?
3. Has it been longer than three years since you had your septic tank cleaned out?
4. Do you dump grease, oil, or leftover household chemicals down your drain?

If you answered "Yes" or you do not know the answer to any of these questions, use this worksheet to address those issues. The information will help you develop a voluntary plan of action to reduce the contamination risks to your drinking water supply.

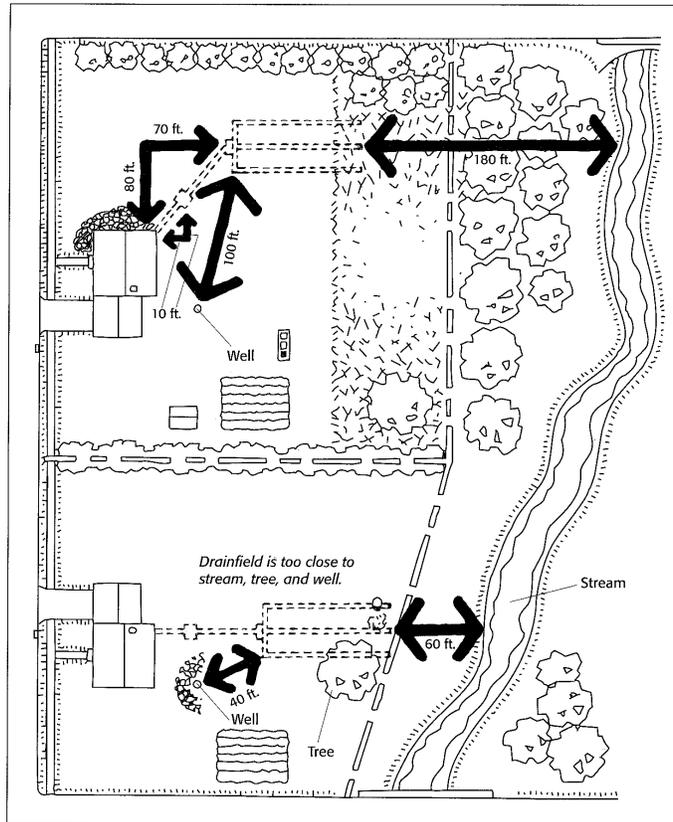


1. Do you have an on-site wastewater treatment system (septic tank and drainfield, or lagoon)?

Household wastewater disposal systems are used to treat and dispose of wastewater from the home. A system that is properly constructed and maintained will function for years and can minimize the potential for ground and surface water contamination. Your septic system will function better if fewer household chemicals go down the drain.

Septic systems typically consist of a septic tank and drain field, or lagoon. Wastewater from household appliances and faucets is routed to the septic tank where liquids and solids are divided. Soft solids such as grease and soap rise to the top and form a scum layer. Other solids sink to the bottom where they can be partially decomposed by bacteria. Liquid from the septic tank is discharged into the drain field or lagoon where disease-causing microorganisms, organics, and nutrients are removed or broken down.

Consider both system design and location when assessing the potential for ground water contamination.



2. Is your wastewater treatment system closer to your well and other water sources than the local code allows?

Your well must be at least 50 feet from your septic tank and at least 100 feet from your soil absorption field or lagoon. You can contact your county health department to determine minimum separation distances for your system.

In addition, your septic system should be located at least 50 feet (100 feet is suggested due to varying geological conditions) from a surface water body to reduce the potential for contamination to your water supply.

3. Has it been longer than three years since your septic tank was cleaned out?

Poor septic system management makes your water supply susceptible to contamination. Maintenance involves regular inspection, pumping every 3 to 5 years and limiting the types of materials disposed of to those that the system can handle. If a garbage disposal is used, a septic system should be pumped out every one to two years.

4. Do you dump grease, oil, or leftover household chemicals down your drain?

Avoid dumping grease and oil down your drain. They can clog the pipes or build up in the septic tank. Keep a separate container for used grease and oil. Properly dispose of them with other household garbage.

Household chemicals that are poured down the drain can damage your septic system. Bacteria present in the system decompose the sewage. When household chemicals are added, they may destroy the beneficial bacteria, impairing the effectiveness of the sewage treatment process.

Glossary

absorption system

wastewater disposal field and adjacent soils for the treatment of sewage in an individual sewage disposal system by means of infiltration

septic tank

a watertight, accessible covered receptacle designed and constructed to receive sewage, to settle solids from the liquid, to digest organic matter, and store digested solids through a period of retention and allow the clarified liquids to discharge to other treatment units for final disposal

sewage

a combination of liquid wastes which may include chemicals, house wastes, human excreta, animal or vegetable matter in suspension or solution, or other solids in suspension or solution and which is discharged from a dwelling, building or other structure

Contacts

CSU Cooperative Extension, Colorado State Office
(303) 491-6172

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Water Quality Control Division
(303) 692-3500

Well*A*Syst Worksheets

Private Drinking Water Well Management
Cistern Management
Site Assessment
Septic System Management
Household Hazardous Waste Management

Livestock Management
Fertilizer Management
Pesticide Management
Petroleum Storage Management

Well*A*Syst is a joint project developed for Colorado by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Colorado State University Cooperative Extension; Colorado Department of Agriculture; the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Water Quality Control Division; the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, State Soil Conservation Board; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Illustrations used in this publication are taken from *Home*A*Syst: An Environmental Risk Assessment Guide for the Home*, developed by the National Farm*A*Syst/Home*A*Syst Program, in cooperation with NRAES, the Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service. Permission to use these materials was granted by the National Farm*A*Syst/Home*A*Syst Office.

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Assessing Your Septic System

If you answered “Yes” or did not know the answer to the previous questions

What you did

Who to call

What to do

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| 1 | Know the location of your wastewater disposal system and test your water supply for all contaminants. | CSU Cooperative Extension; county health department; septic tank installer or service | |
| 2 | Know the location of your wastewater disposal system and test your water supply for all contaminants. | CSU Cooperative Extension; county health department; septic tank installer or service | |
| 3 | Monitor septic tank and pump when needed. | Local septic tank pumping service | |
| 4 | Do not dispose of household chemicals down your drain or toilet. Determine where these materials can be recycled or disposed. | CSU Cooperative Extension; county health department | |