

# Handle It.



## Maintain Your Septic. Protect Your Health.

### Maintain my what?

A septic system is an on-site system of structures that treats household waste with a septic tank and a soil absorption system commonly known as leaching pools. Failing septic systems can contaminate lakes, creeks, and shallow drinking water supplies.

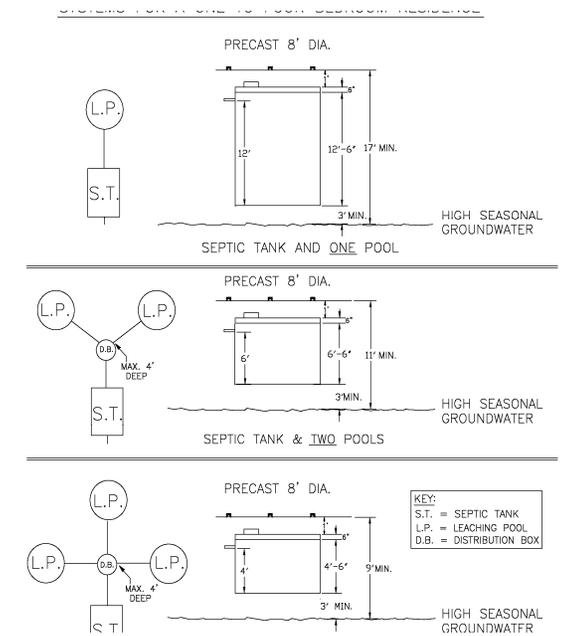
Many older systems on Long Island consist of concrete block built leaching pools. Sewage from the home would be conveyed by the piping network outside into the leaching pool and in some instances homes had an overflow pool for safety. The newer systems, regulated by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services, primarily consist of a precast septic tank which is the first stop for the sanitary solids and liquids, when the tank reaches a certain level, the liquids continue on to a system of leaching pools



where the liquid is absorbed into the subsurface soils. The septic tank is a storage area and biological process area for the solids. When the septic tank is full, it should be pumped out.

### What if it doesn't work?

A septic system that does not work can have a negative impact on human and animal health. Inadequate treatment of wastewater allows bacteria, viruses, and other disease-causing pathogens to enter surface and ground water supplies. Protect your health, drinking water, and property value by properly maintaining your septic system. Do not dump hazardous waste down the sink drain or the toilet, this can be corrosive to the pipes and damaging to the environment.



### How do I make sure it's working?

A properly functioning septic system will treat wastewater in a natural and safe way. Routine maintenance of your system will reduce both risks to human health and costs.

### Septic owners should:

Keep accurate records (i.e. dates of inspection, pumping, problems).

Have systems inspected and pumped every 2 to 3 years.

Prevent vehicles and trailers from driving or parking on top of the leaching field.

Avoid the use of additives. Save your money for an inspection or pumping.

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## Where is this thing?

Try finding your septic tank by:

Going to the basement or area of the house that has the sewer pipes going outside through the wall or floor. This will indicate the direction or location of the septic tank.

Taking a metal rod and gently probing in the soil about 10 to 15 feet from the foundation of the house. Search for pipes or some sort of metal, plastic, or concrete tank.

### Find the system's leaching field by looking for:

Areas where grass isn't growing well, grass is greener, or it grows faster.

Areas where there is a slight depression or mound.

Areas where the soil is soggy when the rest of the yard is dry.

Once you locate your system draw a simple map of the location to keep in your records. To prevent further malfunctions you may want to install a fence around your leaching field area.

If you **DO NOT** receive a sewage bill, then you own a septic system.

If you live in an area of high ground water or are near a water body, you may have a different system than discussed in this brochure

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## Do I smell something?

Signs of a failing system are:

Sewage in the yard.

A foul smelling, blackish/grayish liquid in the drain field area.

Sewage backup in sinks, toilets, showers, and bath tubs.

Isolated depressions in the backyard; if you have these, please call your plumber. There have been old system failures in the past few years around Long Island, don't be a casualty to your septic.

### Can septic systems affect communities?

Septic systems are considered the 2nd most frequent source of groundwater pollution by state agencies.

*U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Water Quality Inventory Report to Congress (305(b) Report), 1998*

Almost 10,000 water body impairments are due to pathogen or nutrient contamination. Septic systems are contributors to these containments.

*U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1998 Section 303(d) List Fact Sheet: National Picture of Impaired Waters Highlights of the 1998 303(d) Lists (based on Tracking System data available 04/06/00)*



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## Septic System Maintenance

1. Direct roof, driveway, and other run-off away from your septic tank and leaching field to avoid adding extra water to the soil.
2. Do not plant trees or shrubs too close to your field or tank. Roots can cause damage and clog your leaching field.
3. Do not bury the septic tank or leaching field under landscaping materials (such as plastic) or pavement;
4. Use basket strainers in all your sinks to catch hair—a big problem for septic systems and guaranteed to shorten the life of your field.
5. Look for liquid detergents or concentrated detergents that don't have phosphates in them.
6. Use a dry well for back flushing water softeners, instead of releasing it into your system.
7. Use a lint filter on your washing machine; lint is a major source of solids that clog leaching fields, especially from the fibers from synthetic clothing which clog the pores of the soil and do not break down as natural fibers do.
8. Do not flush facial tissue, paper towels, coffee grounds, tea leaves, fats or grease, cigarette butts, filters, sanitary napkins, newspaper, disposable diapers, condoms, metal or metal items. All of these items can clog your tank and leaching fields.
9. Don't use a garburetor. It adds solids which can be flushed into your leaching field.
10. Avoid disinfectants like bleach which kill beneficial bacteria in the septic tank.

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