

## DOs and DON'Ts

Tips to keep your tank in working order, reduce the number of times it has to be emptied, protect the environment and save you money!

- ✓ Find your septic tank, the soakaway and where it discharges.
- ✓ Check all parts of your septic system regularly.
- ✓ Ensure access lids are secure and in good working order.
- ✓ Have your tank emptied when necessary.
- ✓ Only use disinfectant and toilet cleaner labelled 'suitable for septic tanks' to avoid upsetting the bacterial balance of your tank.
- ✓ Use a sink strainer as food scraps cause sludge to build up more quickly - put them in your compost bin or green cone.
- ✓ Always use natural, 'environmentally friendly' or 'low phosphate' household products, and use moderate amounts - natural cleaning products such as bicarbonate of soda, vinegar and lemon juice are cheap, effective and environmentally friendly. Try using less detergent in your washing machine and dishwasher.
- ✓ Try to use less water - space out laundry/dishwasher loads to avoid lots of water washing through the system at once.

- ✗ Never flush **anything** other than human waste and toilet paper down the toilet - everything else should be bagged and binned.
- ✗ Never dispose of grease or cooking oil down any drain - wipe out pans, pour fat into a container and put it in a bin.
- ✗ Never put paints, solvents or any chemicals down any drain - dispose of them at a civic amenity site.
- ✗ Don't use caustic soda or drain cleaners to clear blockages - try boiling water instead.
- ✗ Never connect rainwater drainage pipes into your septic tank.

Encourage everyone using your tank to follow this advice!

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### FREE INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Aberdeen City Council  
01224 522168

Aberdeenshire Council  
0845 608 1207  
environmental@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Scottish Environment Protection Agency  
www.sepa.org.uk/water/water\_publications.aspx  
0800 80 70 60

### REGISTERING YOUR TANK

Scottish Environment Protection Agency  
0800 80 70 60  
www.sepa.org.uk/wfdreg

### EMPTYING & OTHER SERVICES

Look in the Yellow Pages under:

- Septic Tanks
- Drain and Pipe Cleaning
- Plumbers
- Sewage Consultants



www.theriverdee.org

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The Dee Catchment Partnership is a voluntary association of agencies, organisations and individuals working to ensure the long-term, sustainable management of the River Dee catchment.

# THE SEPTIC TANK GUIDE



A neglected septic tank is a health risk for you and your family and causes harm to the environment.

Regular maintenance is essential to keep your system safe and working properly.

Encourage everyone in your household to follow this advice!



Make friends with your septic tank!

# YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

## WHY SHOULD I LOOK AFTER MY SEPTIC TANK?

- You have a legal responsibility to maintain your septic system in good working order.
- You will protect your family's health and the environment.
- Your tank will have to be emptied less often, saving you money.
- If the system fails it will be expensive to repair.

## WHERE DO I FIND MY SEPTIC TANK?

- Look for a metal or concrete lid - this may have become overgrown.
- Your tank will normally be downhill from your property.
- Your title deeds or local knowledge may help you to find your tank.
- Remember the tank may not be on your land and may be shared with neighbouring properties.

## HOW DOES MY SEPTIC TANK WORK?

If your property is not served by a public sewerage system, then your sewage and waste water is treated by a septic tank or other form of treatment system. This system retains sewage solids and discharges treated liquid effluent to a soakaway. If the soil conditions are not suitable for a soakaway then the discharge may be to surface water e.g. a burn, river, loch, or the sea.

## WHAT CHECKS SHOULD I MAKE?

- **Household drainage:** If the drains are slow to clear or toilets are backing up the pipes may be blocked, the tank may be full or the soakaway may be clogged.
- **Tank:** Maintain an accessible, well-fitting cover. This is essential for your safety. There should be no smell from the tank.
- **Soakaway:** If the soakaway is swampy, smelly or has prolific grass growth it has become clogged. To avoid this happening keep a check on the system and have the tank emptied regularly.
- **Discharge:** Check the inspection chamber or the end of the discharge pipe. A pale liquid with little or no smell is normal. If the discharge is dark or smelly or contains solids the system is failing.
- **Vegetation:** Deep-rooting trees and shrubs can damage your septic system. Keep them away from the tank, soakaway and drains.

**! If any of these factors apply, you should act quickly so that the environmental damage and the cost of repair do not get any worse. Call a plumber or drainage specialist if necessary.**

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAVE MY TANK EMPTIED (DE-SLUDGED)?

If the septic tank has not been emptied in the past 2 years you should make the checks listed on the left immediately and if in doubt arrange for your tank to be emptied. **A build up of sludge is the most common cause of problems.**

## HOW CAN I REDUCE THE NEED FOR HAVING MY TANK EMPTIED?

All tanks need to be emptied regularly. The frequency depends on the number of users, the size of the tank and how well you care for your system.

- Only use disinfectant and toilet cleaner labelled 'suitable for septic tanks'.
- Never put any chemicals down any drain.
- Use less water to reduce the flow through the tank.

**As a result you should find that your tank needs to be emptied less frequently.**

## DO I NEED TO REGISTER MY TANK WITH SEPA?

All septic tanks must be registered with SEPA. All new septic tanks require authorisation before they are installed. For existing septic tanks registration should occur when your house is next sold - the buying agent will require all appropriate authorisations associated with the property to be provided. Applications can be made online at [www.sepa.org.uk/wfdreg](http://www.sepa.org.uk/wfdreg) or using a paper application. You can check whether your septic tank is already registered by contacting your local SEPA office.

## Waste water flows from your house into the septic tank

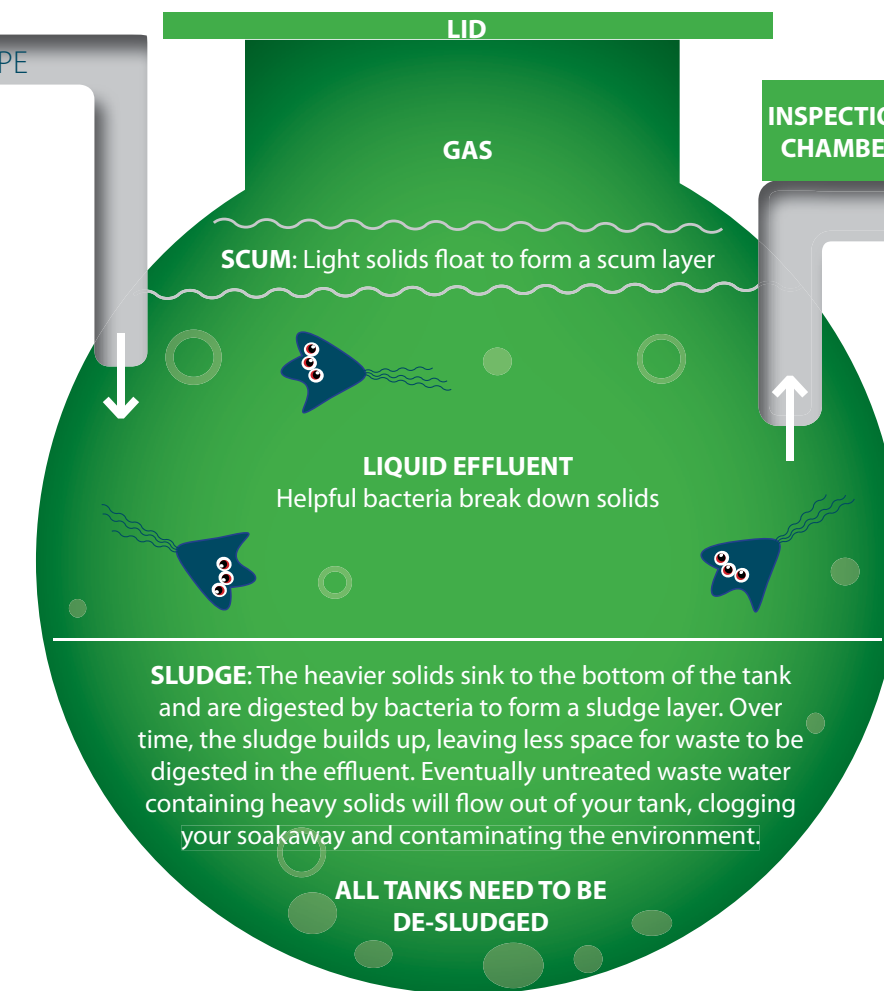
The number of people using your septic system, the amount of water you use, the size of your tank and what you put down the drain all affect how well your system works and how often your tank needs to be emptied.



	<b>RAINWATER DRAINAGE</b> Too much inflowing water causes the effluent to pass through the tank before the bacteria have had a chance to work. Solids can be pushed through the system, clogging the soakaway and polluting the discharge. Plus, surface water will carry soil and grit into your tank.
	<b>KITCHEN TOWELS, SANITARY ITEMS, COTTON BUDS, CONDOMS, NAPPIES</b> These can block your drains. They will not break down in the tank and will cause the sludge to build up more quickly.
	<b>OIL, GREASE, FAT</b> Fats solidify and block your drains. They are not broken down in the tank and so cause the sludge to build up more quickly.
	<b>SOLVENTS, PAINTS, DISINFECTANTS, PESTICIDES, MEDICINES, BLEACHES, CAUSTIC SODA, DRAIN CLEANERS</b> These chemicals kill the helpful bacteria in your septic tank, stopping the system from digesting effluent.
	<b>UNSUITABLE HOUSEHOLD CLEANING PRODUCTS</b> Phosphates from household cleaning products are a major pollutant of watercourses. Septic tanks do not remove phosphates. <b>Less phosphate in means less phosphate out.</b>

## Sewage solids and fats are retained in the tank

Your septic tank is a living ecosystem where helpful bacteria do the work of digesting waste.



## Liquid (effluent) drains away from the tank and, usually, into a soakaway where it is further treated by the soil. Some tanks discharge directly to a burn, river, loch or the sea.

Effluent contains chemical residues (called **phosphates**) from household cleaning products. Phosphates are a major pollutant of watercourses.

If your system is failing, the effluent may also contain dangerous levels of **harmful bacteria** from the faeces in the tank. These bacteria pose a serious health risk to families and communities.

