

Questions About Septic Systems

[Click Here](#) to learn about the different types of septic systems including:

- Conventional Systems - passive systems with drainfields
- Gravelled or Stone Systems
- Chambered System Leachfield
- Low-Pressure Dose Systems
- Evapotranspiration Systems
- Aerobic Wastewater Treatment Systems

Questions Applicable to All Types of Septic Systems

Do I need to obtain a permit to repair my septic system?

Yes. With few exceptions, Texas law [requires an approved permit](#) to repair any type of septic system. This law is intended to assure that the person making the repairs is experienced and understands the correct procedures and processes for repairing a system. The law is in place to protect the environment as well as the homeowner and his neighbors.

What is the process for obtaining a repair or installation permit.

In Texas septic system repair and installation permits are issued through your county health department. The permit application considers the type of soil, placement of the system relative to creeks, rivers, lakes and property lines, as well as the type of septic system to be repaired or replaced and the installation or repair plan. Each county maintains a list of licensed septic service companies. Because of the potential difficulties involved in obtaining permits, most service providers require the homeowner to complete and file the application. In most instances we, at Septic Solutions, are able to handle these details for our customers.

Can I flush toilet paper into my system?

All septic systems are designed to properly process toilet paper. The size of the holding tank is based on the number of bedrooms in the home. Commercially manufactured toilet paper is septic system safe. Therefore, so long as the system is not required to handle more wastewater than it was designed to handle, there should be no problem using toilet paper.

How often do I need to have my system pumped?

This answer depends on the size of the system and the number of people using the system. However, for the average household, the answer is every three to five years.

Tank Size (gallons)	Household size (number of people)								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+
	Duration (in years) Between Pumpings or Inspections								
1,750	19.1	14.2	12.6	1.8	1.3	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.4

1,000	12.4	15.9	13.7	2.6	2.0	1.5	1.2	1.0	0.8
1,250	15.6	17.5	14.8	3.4	2.6	2.0	1.7	1.4	1.2
1,500	18.9	19.1	15.9	4.2	3.3	2.6	2.1	1.8	1.5
1,750	22.1	10.7	16.9	5.0	3.9	3.1	2.6	2.2	1.9
2,000	25.4	12.4	18.1	5.9	4.5	3.7	3.1	2.6	2.2
2,250	28.6	14.0	19.1	6.7	5.2	4.2	3.5	3.0	2.6
2,500	31.9	15.6	10.2	7.5	5.9	4.8	4.0	3.5	3.0

Above table provided by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Do I need to add additives to my system?

In most instances additives are unnecessary to maintain a properly functioning septic system. However, sometimes a system will become overloaded with organic material and the enzymes and bacteria in additives can actually help. This can occur when a system is temporarily required to process more waste than it was designed to process, such as instances when there are frequent large parties or extra guests for an extended period of time. The need for these supplements is best determined by your service provider.

Flooding Related Questions Applicable to All Types of Septic Systems

Septic system flooding occurs when a conventional drain field has been super-saturated by rain, or rising stream, creek, or river water. In an aerobic system flooding occurs when the aerobic tanks fill with runoff rain water and cease to function. In either case the first indication that there is a problem is usually that toilets no longer flush properly. Raw sewage may also back up into shower and bath drains first since they are usually located at the lowest gravity point in the house. Here are some common steps to take when dealing with a flooded septic system:

What steps should I take if I suspect that my septic system is flooded?

1. If possible don't use the system while the drain field or tanks are covered with water. The wastewater will not be treated and will become a source of pollution. Conserve water as much as possible while the system attempts to restore itself and the water table falls.
2. If you have an aerobic septic system (with electric pumps), try to prevent silt from entering the pump chamber. When the pump chamber becomes flooded, silt has a tendency to settle in the chamber and ultimately clog the drainfield or damage the pump if it was not removed prior to flooding.
3. Use caution when opening the septic tank for pumping while the soil is still saturated. Mud and silt may enter the tank and end up in the drainfield. In addition, pumping out a tank that is sitting in saturated soil may cause it to "pop out" of the ground. Newer systems are more likely to pop out than older systems because the soil may not have completely settled and compacted.
4. Do not dig into the tank or drainfield area while the soil is still wet or flooded. Try to avoid using any heavy machinery near the drainfield or tanks in a saturated state, as they are especially vulnerable to damage under flooded conditions. Such activity may permanently ruin the soil's ability to conduct fluid.
5. Flooding of the septic tank usually lifts the floating crust of fats and grease in the septic tank. Some of this scum may float and partially clog the outlet tee. If the septic system backs up into the house, check the tank first for outlet blockage. Clean up any floodwater in the house without dumping it into the sink or toilet and allow enough time for the water to recede. Floodwaters in a house that are subsequently passed through or pumped through the septic tank will cause higher than normal flows through the system. As a result the risk of outlet tee clogging increases dramatically.
6. Avoid contact with any electric pump or equipment that may have been submerged during the flood until the device is clean and dry.
7. Aerobic systems, upflow filters, trickling filters and other media filters may have been clogged due to mud and sediment. These systems will need to be washed, raked, and cleaned prior to restarting the system.

What should I do after the flood waters recede?

1. If you also have an in ground well, do not drink the water until it has been tested by you county health department.
2. Do not use the sewage system until the water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level at any point around the house.
3. Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include visible settling or the ground above the tank or an inability of the system to accept additional water. Most septic systems are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and soil and must then be cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system is may have to be installed as the there is no effective way to clean out the buried lines in an absorption field.
4. Have your tanks repaired or cleaned by trained specialists as the tanks may contain dangerous gases and pathogens.
5. If sewage has backed up into a basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to a gallon of water.

Questions Specific to Aerobic Wastewater Treatment Systems

How do I renew my Aerobic System maintenance contract?

Each aerobic system comes with a free, two year maintenance contract that commences the day the installation process is complete. This service is initially provided by the installation company. Since most systems are relatively easily maintained during the first two years, some installers do not offer maintenance beyond that initial period. It then falls to the homeowner to find a licensed service provider who is trained and qualified to maintain the homeowner's specific brand of aerobic system. When you sign up with Septic Solutions, your maintenance contract is automatically renewed each year.

What services are provided under by a maintenance contract?

Typical maintenance contracts provide for three system inspections per year to certify that the system is operating properly. Expenses associated with repairs, chlorine, and pumping (when required) are the responsibility of the homeowner. At Septic Solutions, we offer three levels of [maintenance contract service](#). Our customers choose the contract that is right for their situation. Our Silver Plan covers free chlorine maintenance while our Gold Plan offers complete coverage including required parts and repairs.

What activities are performed during a routine maintenance visit

This will vary between service providers. At Septic Solutions, we inspect and clean all electrical and mechanical components to ensure proper functionality. In addition we check the sludge level in your holding tank. Upon completion of the inspection we provide our customers and the county with a written report of our findings.

How important are the air and water pumps on an aerobic system?

Both pumps are essential to proper operation of a system. The air pump is used to aerate the wastewater and speed the processes of decomposition. The water pump is used to force the discharge water through the spray lines and onto to the land surface. If either fails to operate properly the wastewater will turn septic. This may be observed as black, smelly water being discharged by the system.

Is the water that is discharged by an aerobic system safe?

All commercially certified aerobic systems produce safe water when properly maintained. The water is treated to kill or eliminate pathogens before they can be discharged through the spray field. However, the water is not treated to the level where it is considered safe to drink or drinkable.

How much does chlorine cost per year?

The average family on an aerobic system spends \$200 to \$300 per year for chlorine. We offer our customers the option of installing a Smart=Chlor Liquid Chlorinator that can be operated at a substantial reduction in chlorine cost.

Why does my aerobic system have an unpleasant odor?

The most common reasons for aerobic system odors are: 1) Overloading the system with chemicals, 2) the presence of a restriction in the air supply, 3) more wastewater input to the system than it was designed to handle, and 4) inadequate disinfectant supply. Diagnosing the cause of odors is a difficult process that is best left to your septic system professional.

How often should I add chlorine?

Adding chlorine is on an "as needed" basis. You should monitor your system to assure that there are a minimum of 2-3 chlorine tablets in the tube at all times.

Can I maintain my aerobic system myself and avoid the need for a maintenance contract?

Texas law permits homeowners to maintain their own system when they have completed a 6-hour, state-approved Basic Wastewater Operations Course, pass the state test, receive a Class D Wastewater Certificate, and receive a certification from the manufacturer of their specific wastewater system. Once the required certificates are obtained, self-maintaining homeowners are required to file copies of all certificates with the county health department. Due to time commitments required to obtain a certificate, the inherent unpleasantness associated with checking sludge levels, and the requirement to use licensed septic providers to make all necessary repairs, most customers prefer to have their [system's maintenance under contract](#) with a certified septic provider.

Questions Specific to Non-Aerobic Wastewater Systems

How can I tell where the problem is with my non-aerobic septic system?

We offer a [diagnostic tool](#) on our website that will help you identify the section of your system that is causing a problem.

Didn't Find an Answer to Your Question

[Click Here](#)