



# Greater Stockport Creek Watershed

## Fact Sheet— Septic System Maintenance

### MAINTENANCE IS CRITICAL FOR A WELL FUNCTIONING SEPTIC SYSTEM

Management of your on-site wastewater treatment system

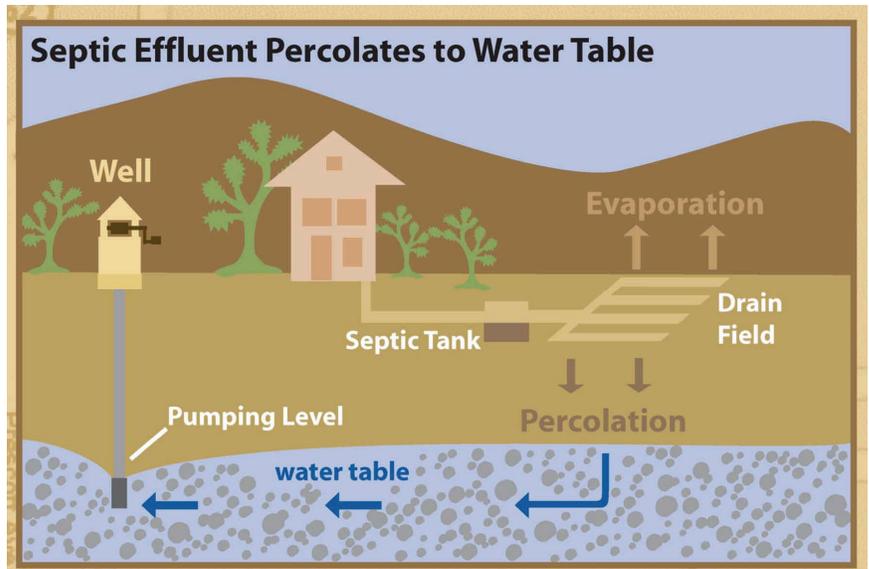
(OWTS), commonly known as a “septic tank,” is one of the most important responsibilities for a homeowner. A poorly maintained or functioning OWTS can have a significant negative impact on water quality as the system can become a major source of nutrient loading to the Kinderhook, Claverack & Stockport Creeks.

A well designed and well maintained OWTS is highly effective for the treatment of human waste and waste water because pathogens are filtered out before reaching groundwater.

When wastewater is treated by an OWTS, as are many homes in Columbia, Rensselaer & Berkshire Counties, homeowners should realize that they are a utility operator and as such are responsible for the operation and maintenance of that utility system.

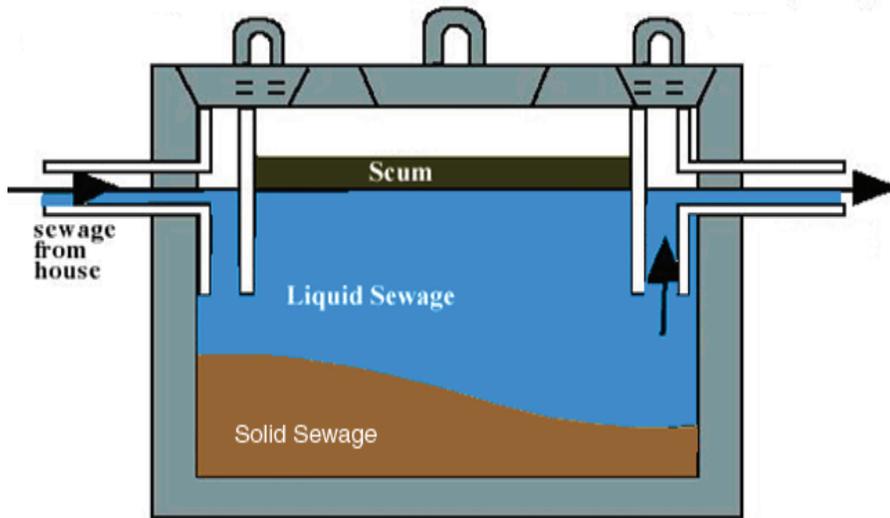
The septic tank is the primary component of the OWTS and regular pumping and inspection of the tank are a necessary and essential part of the operation and maintenance of a septic tank. Failure to properly maintain an OWTS can damage the overall system, which could require costly upgrade or replacement, and can quickly negatively impact our watershed.

Septic tanks come in many shapes and sizes. The size of the septic tank is based on the amount of waste flow, which is determined from the number of bedrooms in the home. The standard septic tank for a typical three bedroom home is 1,000 gallons.



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The primary function of the septic tank is to settle solids out of wastewater, and allow the liquid portion to flow into absorption fields for treatment. The wastewater remains in the tank for about 36 hours which provides enough time for the sewage to settle into three layers. The floating scum layer, which forms near the top of the tank, consists primarily of soaps, greases and toilet paper. The sludge layer contains the heavy organic and inorganic material that settles to the bottom of the tank. The liquid layer, which forms between the scum and sludge layers, consists of water, liquids and some suspended solids. It is this liquid layer that is allowed to exit the tank to next be treated by the treatment system.

## KEY POINTS FOR SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

### 1. Know where your septic tank is:

Have a plan of your septic system. If not available, field probing for the tank based on observing the house plumbing can be useful. Another option is to use a transmitter that is flushed down your toilet; a receiver is then used to locate your tank.

**2. Routinely pump your septic tank:** Typically, the tank of a three-bedroom house with average use should be pumped every one-two years; however, this might differ for seasonal residences depending on use. In New York State, only NYS Department of Environmental Conservation permitted septage haulers shall be engaged to pump out septic tanks. To obtain a list of licensed haulers, you can contact the NYSDEC Regulatory Office in Albany at (518) 402-8707.

**3. Inspect tank structurally after pump out:** The structural inspection should look for visible failures. A septic tank should contain baffles and/or tees which prevent direct flow through the tank and allows solids to settle out. If present, the effluent filter should be checked on the outlet pipe. The tank should be water tight with no cracks or corrosion in order to prevent exfiltration of wastewater that can pollute the groundwater and infiltration that can reduce the tank's storage capacity.

**4. Inspect tank for water entering after pump out:** During the inspection, there should be no water running in the home. If water is observed to be flowing into the tank during the inspection, this indicates there is a leak in the piping leading to the tank. Water draining back into the tank through the outlet pipe indicates a potential problem with the absorption field being clogged requiring further inspection.

Regular pumping and routine inspection of an OWTS is one of the most important aspects of a property operation and maintenance schedule. Failure to maintain and inspect your tank can result in potential health hazards and aesthetic nuisances due to sewage overflow and/or backup that can result in the replacement of a clogged absorption field. Failure to properly maintain an OWTS also contributes to negative impacts for the water quality of the Kinderhook, Claverack & Stockport Creek Watersheds.

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