

Why it's important to maintain your septic tank



Unless your property is connected to the main sewage network, it is likely you will have an on-site wastewater treatment system called a septic tank.

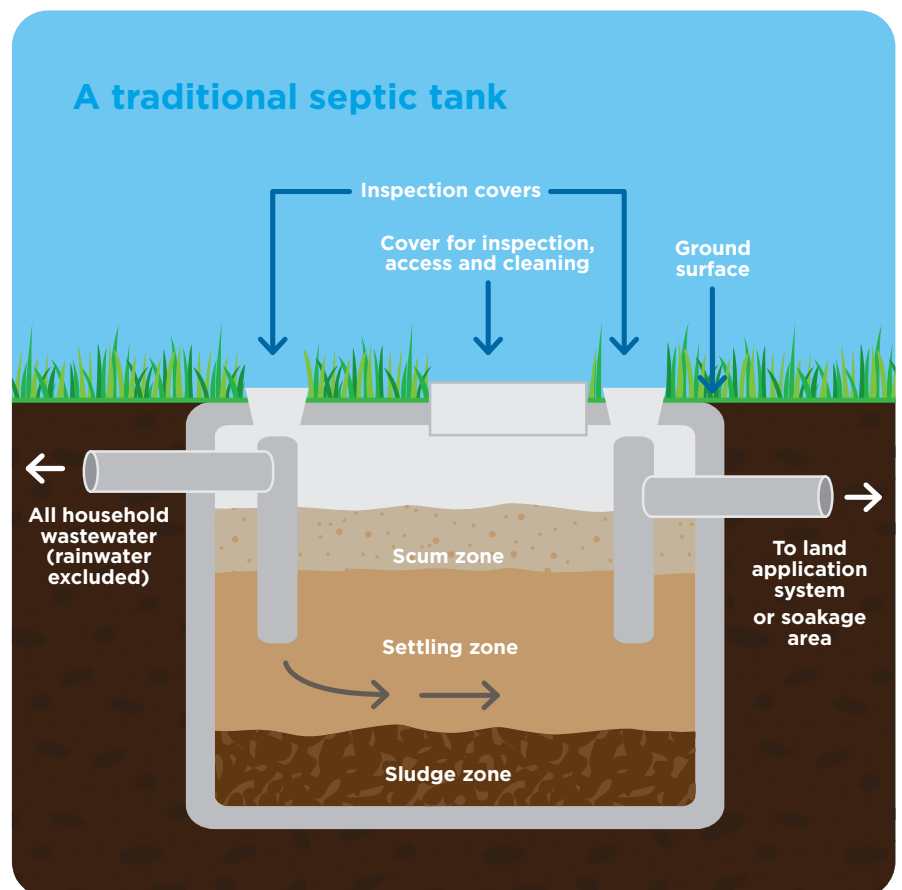
This septic tank will be buried somewhere on your property and will process all wastewater from your toilet, kitchen, bathroom and laundry.

Unless properly maintained a septic tank can become a serious health hazard, by spreading disease and contaminating water.

To ensure this doesn't happen, septic tanks need to be regularly maintained by an approved contractor.

Why do I need to maintain my septic tank?

Over time the volume of sludge and scum in a septic tank starts to build up. Because of this build up, the operating volume and overall effectiveness of the septic tank is reduced.

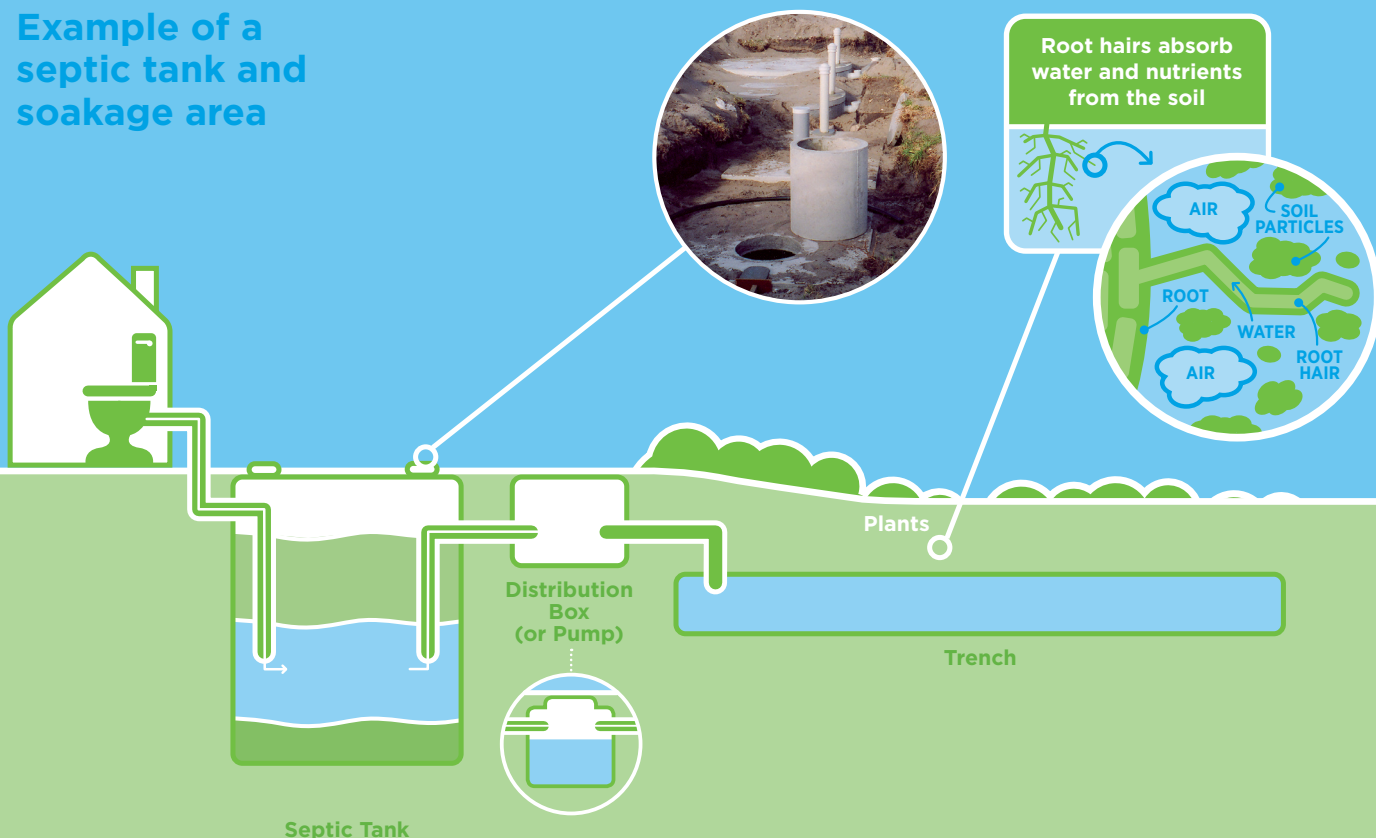


How do they work?

Wastewater discharges into the septic tank and the heavier solids (sludge) settle to the bottom of the tank, while fats (scum) float to the top. This sludge and scum decomposes in the tank.

The remaining liquid flows out of the tank and discharges into a soakage area. There are also other materials, like sand, soil and minerals, that are not able to be broken down and stay within the tank.

Example of a septic tank and soakage area



How do I maintain my septic tank?

When a septic tank is full it needs to be pumped out (emptied) by an approved contractor and removed to an authorised disposal facility.

Where the property is in a Maintenance Zone, the contractor must send confirmation of the pump-out and the inspection report to the Regional Council.

We also encourage the installation of outlet filters. They operate by screening the discharge and prevent larger particles being carried over into the land application area. The filter will need to be installed by your drain layer and cleaned at the same time as when the tank is pumped out. Regular blocking of the filter may indicate the tank needs pumping.

When do I need to maintain my tank?

Tanks need to be regularly inspected by an approved contractor to ensure they are operating effectively. When the volume of sludge and scum reaches about one third of the total volume of the tank it should be regarded as “full”. For example, a tank would require emptying around every three years for a dwelling with four or five people. A small tank of less than 3000 litres will require emptying more frequently.

By measuring sludge and scum at the time the tank is being emptied, the contractor can determine when the next service is likely to be required.

Other things you can do to improve the performance of your septic tank:

- Minimise water use
- Divert stormwater away from your land treatment area.
- Don't over-use powerful bleaches and disinfectants, or put chemicals or paint down the drain.
- Only flush toilet paper and human waste down the toilet. Sanitary items and wet wipes should not be flushed.
- Don't allow vehicles to drive on the soakage area.
- Don't build anything including driveways and patios over your septic tank or soakage area.

For further information contact Bay of Plenty Regional Council on 0800 884 880 and ask for the OSET Project Officer or visit www.boprc.govt.nz

