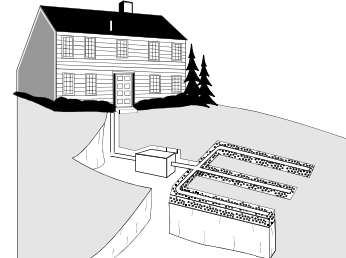




Septic System Failures



When septic systems do not function properly, humans may come into contact with wastewater that contains disease organisms and other harmful substances. Failure of the system can be caused by lack of proper maintenance, overuse of water in the household, or improper design of the septic system.

Indicators of a failing system includes a sulfur or rotten egg smell in the vicinity of the system or indoors, water and possibly solids surfacing in the drainfield, or sewage backing up in the house. Well water tests showing high levels of nitrates or coliform bacteria may also be an indicator.

Solids that build up in the septic tank must be removed periodically. If this build up is not pumped out, solids will enter the drainfield and plug it up. Costs for drainfield replacement is usually several thousand dollars. Costs for pumping out a septic tank typically run around \$100. It is recommended that septic tanks be pumped out at least every 3 years.

Over use of water is a common problem. Septic systems are designed to handle a certain amount of water each day, usually depending on the number of people living in the house when the system was put in. Such things as a family of 4 moving into a house with a septic system designed for 1 or 2 people will cause a premature failure. Other overuses of water include leaking toilets or faucets, or doing more than 3 large loads of laundry per day.

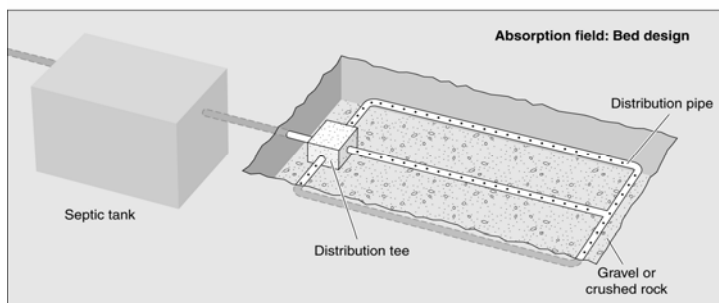
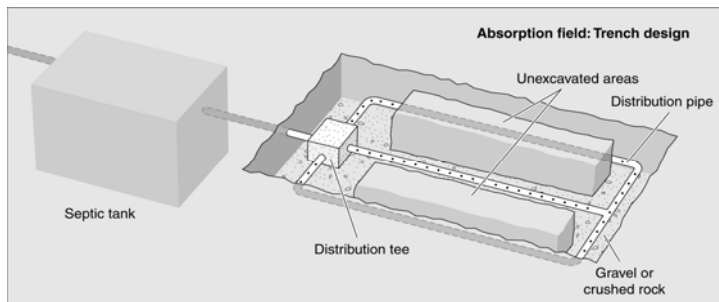


Illustration by M.R. Greenburg

Improper design can occur when the wrong type of system was installed. Soil conditions, high water tables, and use of a garbage disposal all must be taken into account when a system is put in.

Maintained septic systems will be trouble free for many years. Following a good water conservation and tank cleaning program will assure this happens.

For more information on septic systems, get a copy of the University of Illinois Extension publication *Septic Systems- A Homeowners Guide*, at local Extension offices.