



# Farmington Valley Health District

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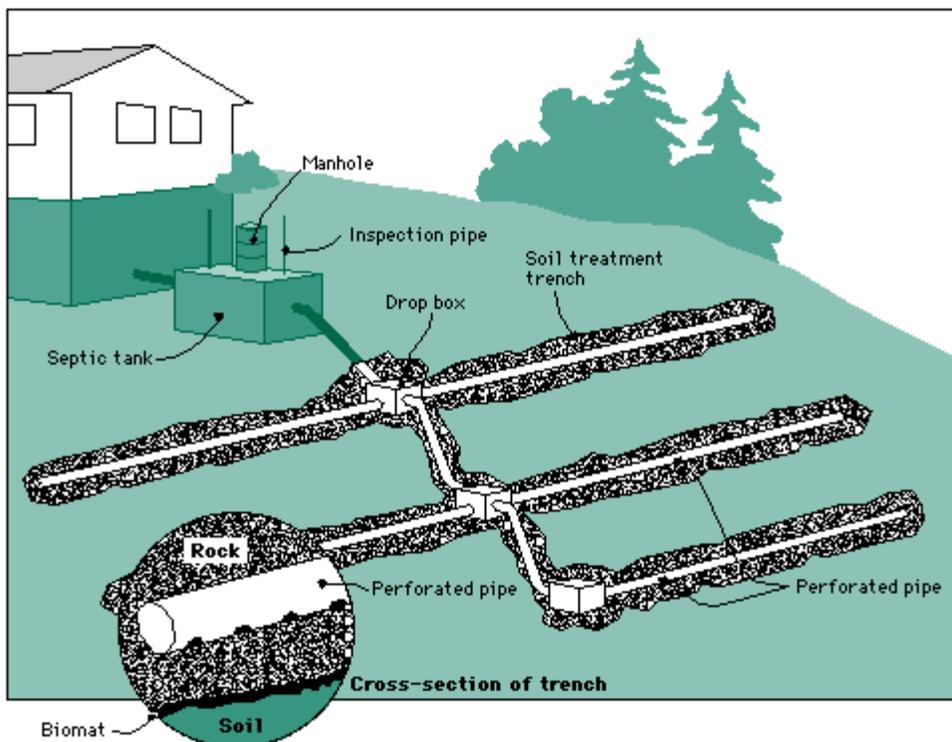
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## Septic Systems

Within the FVHD approximately 60% of residents rely on a septic system to treat their wastewater. A septic system is made up of a septic tank and a leaching area. The purpose of a septic system is to properly dispose of and treat domestic wastewater/sewage from a building or home in a safe manner so that the public's health and the environment are protected. When wastewater leaves the home it enters the septic tank where solids settle, scum floats, and liquids either flow because of gravity or are pumped into the leaching area after passing through an outlet baffle filter. Solids need to be periodically pumped out of the tank every 3 to 5 years for maintenance or more often if house has a garbage disposal. Bulky items such as: diapers, paper towels, cigarette butts, sanitary napkins, condoms, and cat-litter should not be put into your septic system. These solids can increase the frequency of pumping a septic system and cause your effluent filter to clog. The sewage effluent that enters the leaching area is dispersed into the soil to allow for biological filtration to take place.



The FVHD is responsible for:

- Permitting all activities related to the construction or repair of any septic system.
- Investigating any complaints related to failing septic systems, which occur when sewage is discharging onto the surface of the ground or backing up into the house. A failing septic system is also defined as

sewage being discharged into a waterway or catch basin. All of these conditions are public health hazards enforceable by the CT Public Health Code (PHC).

- Reviewing and approving plans for engineered septic systems.
- Conducting and / or witnessing soil evaluations and percolation tests to assure site suitability.
- Retaining records for all new and repaired septic systems including as-built drawings.
- Assuring that any construction activities, or changes in use of the property, do not adversely impact the septic system or reduce potential repair area.

**Homeowners connected to septic systems are responsible for contacting the FVHD if they are interested in:**

- Altering or repairing any part of their septic system.
- Constructing a new septic system.
- Planning to construct an exterior/interior addition, renovation, or accessory structure (i.e. adding bedrooms, decks, sheds, barns, propane tanks, swimming pools... etc.)
- Performing a lot line revision.
- Connecting to public sewers.

**What is NOT OK TO PUT IN my septic system?**

- FVHD does not recommend the use of septic system additives offered for sale for the purpose of correcting a malfunctioning system or improving the performance of a septic system. ( i.e. degreasing agents, caustic chemicals, solvents, bacterial digestion enhancers, enzymes, yeast) These products may impair the biological activities in the septic system and then pass into the ground water, which may result in a health hazard.
- The FVHD does not recommend the use of the groundwater safe list from the Department of Energy and Protection (DEEP).
- Paints, oils, greases, and pesticides should never be disposed of in a toilet or sink; they can harm the septic system and groundwater.
- Backwash from any water treatment such as water softeners may pollute drinking water and cause damage to you septic system.

**What is NOT OK TO PUT ON my septic system?**

- Vehicles or other large objects should not be placed on your septic system because they can compact soil and reduce the ability to treat wastewater and damage pipes/structures in the system.
- Water loving shrubs with deep roots or trees near leaching area because the roots can damage pipes or clog leaching area.

**What are some common symptoms of a system that is experiencing difficulties?**

- Patches of lush green grass.
- Strong sewage odors outside the area of the septic system.
- Pooling of wastewater on the ground surface with a strong sewage odor.

- When plumbing fixtures such as sinks, showers, toilets exhibit slow drainage, it may be an indication of a septic system problem or clogging of pipes.
- Drainback from leaching areas into septic tanks after pumping may indicate that leaching areas are saturated.

### **What maintenance is required for septic systems?**

- Pumping your septic tank every 3- 5 years as recommended by the FVHD and the CT DPH.
- More frequent pumping (3 years) if home has a garbage disposal, large family, or undersized septic tank.
- Keep a record of maintenance of your septic system that includes who installed it, who/what maintenance has been done, date of the work, and current status of system.

### **Where can I get information about MY septic system?**

- FVHD may have a property file that contains copies of permits, design plans, as built drawings, and soil test data.
- Go to the Document Search tab at the top of the FVHD.org webpage.
- Contact the company that pumps the septic tank.

### **What should I know/do if I am buying a home with a septic system?**

- Gather as much information as possible: System location, drawings of the system, records of maintenance and or repair, pumping contractor used, and past performance of the system.
- Do a site inspection of the property by locating system and walking over the area. Look for evidence of sewage overflow, greener grass, or odors.
- During home inspection ask for a test to be performed to evaluate the septic system. Because there is no standard protocol for septic system inspection in CT, none of these tests are a guarantee to a properly functioning or malfunctioning septic system, but they may be useful.
  - A dye test traces the movement of septic tank effluent into the leaching area, if the dye resurfaces to ground, brook, or catch basin the system is in failure.
  - A probe test locates the elements of the septic system and determines if they are experiencing overflow conditions. This is a limited test because it is a snap shot of the system's condition.
  - A flood test discharges a substantial quantity of water into existing septic system to simulate peak usage by a family. An inspector will then examine the leaching area to see if there are signs of an overflow which means the system may not be working properly.
- Review property files at the FVHD or online at fvhd.org and ask a sanitarian to go over the file with you.
- Once the system has already been installed the homeowner should know and abide by the allowable GPD (gallons per day) listed on the permit to discharge.
- Know the costs of fixing or repairing a septic system.