



## St. Lawrence County Public Health Department

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### Press Release

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#### St. Lawrence County Public Health Guidance for Maintaining Septic Systems

A septic system is designed to eliminate wastewater from the home in rural areas without a centralized sewer system. Septic systems work by separating liquids, such as oil and grease, from the solids in wastewater. The liquid (known as effluent) is then slowly released into the soil. Most septic systems are composed of a house sewer drain, a septic tank, a distribution box, and a soil absorption (leach) field.

As a homeowner, it's important that you are properly using and maintaining your septic system. Failing to do so can lead to sewage backups inside your home, contaminate nearby drinking water & swimming areas, and can make those who come in contact with the contaminated water sick.

#### Regular Maintenance for Septic Systems

- Pump out the septic tank every 2-3 years
- Keep a record of pumping, inspections, maintenance, and repairs
- Map out septic tank and components
- Don't drive or park heavy equipment over the septic system
- Don't build structures over the absorption field
- Don't flush strong chemicals down the drains
- Avoid septic tank additives
- Avoid garbage disposals or grinders
- Direct drainage away from the septic system
- Plant grass or only shallow rooted plants over the field

#### Signs of Septic System Failure

- Water and sewage is backing up into the home
- Bathtubs, showers, and sinks drain very slowly
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing system
- Standing water in the drain field
- Algal blooms in nearby ponds/lakes

- High levels of nitrates and/or coliform bacteria in water wells

#### A Septic System is NOT a Garbage Disposal

A septic system is not designed to be used like a garbage disposal. Adding solids of any kind, including coffee grinds, food waste, and even certain products marketed as “flushable” is never a good idea. These types of materials can take a long time to break down, upset the pH levels, and lead to backups.

#### Further Information

Septic System Operation and Maintenance (ny.gov)

<https://www.epa.gov/septic/septic-systems-overview>

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