

# Have you completed a Septic Tank System Check?



**Maintaining your septic tank system helps to protect your health and your local environment.**

- Around 500,000 households in Ireland have a septic tank system and 137,000 of these also have a private well for drinking water.
- One quarter of septic tank systems inspected failed the inspection due to lack of proper operation and maintenance – this can affect your drinking water.
- Many people assume that their well water is safe to drink and don't treat it or get it tested.
- A recent survey found E.coli, which can cause serious illness, in 29% of Irish private wells.



## The Do's & Don'ts of your Septic Tank System

More info overleaf

 <p>Check your septic treatment system including all manholes for blockages, ponding, odours &amp; noises every year.</p>	 <p>Treat grey water from washing machines and sinks in the septic tank system.</p>	 <p>Do not allow rainwater from roofing into the septic treatment system. Divert to soakaway.</p>	 <p>Do not pour fat and grease or hazardous chemicals down the sink.</p>
 <p>Use a permitted contractor to remove sludge from your septic tank system. Contact your local authority for a list.</p>	 <p>Conserve water by using water saving devices.</p>	 <p>Do not over use bleach and disinfectants.</p>	 <p>Do not use sink macerators as they can increase the organic load by 30% and result in additional maintenance.</p>
 <p>Test your private well water every year, after heavy rain.</p>	 <p>Keep records of de-sludging and maintenance for five years.</p>	 <p>Do not locate driveways or paved areas over the percolation area.</p>	 <p>Do not flush non-degradable products down the toilet, i.e. feminine care products, nappies, condoms, wipes.</p>

## How a septic tank system treats your wastewater...

1. EVERYTHING you flush down the toilet and send down the sinks, showers and washing machine/dishwasher ends up in your septic tank system.
2. Wastewater flows from the house to the septic tank. The solids and scum form sludge in the tank that needs to be removed regularly.
3. Liquid effluent percolates down from the pipes through the soil in your garden. The soil is where most of the treatment takes place, as it helps filter out the bacteria before making its way to the groundwater in the bedrock below – the same groundwater that supplies water for any local wells.

**“A well maintained system in the right site with the right soil conditions will protect your health, your local environment and your pocket.”**

GROUNDWATER

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the difference between a septic tank system and a packaged treatment system?

Both treat domestic wastewater. A septic tank system depends more on the soil in the percolation area to provide most of the treatment and so works well where the ground conditions are suitable. A packaged treatment system has more mechanical parts that treat the wastewater within the system itself and less on the soil, these systems require more maintenance. Sludge has to be removed from both types of systems.

### What are my responsibilities as a homeowner?

You have a legal obligation and a duty of care to make sure your system is installed, operated and maintained so it doesn't pose a risk to human health and the environment.

### What is the sludge in the system?

All of the wastewaters from your dwelling house discharge to your system. The sludge is an accumulation of all of the solids.

### Why do I need to remove the sludge from my septic tank system?

The sludge must not build up too much or your system will stop working properly. The sludge, if not removed, can block the pipes in your percolation area. If this happens it is very difficult to clean and may require replacement – an expensive option! It could also cause a risk to human health and the environment.

### How often should you remove the sludge from your system?

It is recommended to remove the sludge regularly, how often depends on the system's capacity and use. You must remove the sludge from the tank if the sludge comes up to about 400 mm from the bottom of the tank. A minimum of 75 mm of sludge should remain in the tank as it contains billions of the good microbes necessary to help breakdown the new solids. Use a permitted contractor and keep your receipt.

### Who can remove the sludge from your system?

If you are a farmer with your own land you can spread the sludge but only in accordance with the Waste Management (Use of Sewage Sludge in Agriculture) Regulations.

If you do not have your own land you must get the sludge removed by a permitted contractor. Details on permitted contractors operating in your county are available from your local authority.

### Where does the sludge go?

Permitted contractors bring the sludge to authorised wastewater treatment plants for treatment. Details on permitted contractors operating in your county are available from your local authority.

### For more information contact your local authority or go to

[www.epa.ie/water/wastewater/info](http://www.epa.ie/water/wastewater/info)