

## Did you know?

Proper operation and maintenance of your septic system helps to:

- Save you thousands of dollars in the long run by extending the life of your system—having to replace or repair a septic system can get very expensive;
- Protect our ground, surface and drinking water from contamination;
- Prevent bacterial pollution from entering Puget Sound directly or through stormwater run-off into creeks and streams;
- Keep shellfish harvested from public waters safe to eat; and
- Prevent sewage from surfacing.

The cheapest septic system you will ever have is the one you're using now. Avoid the cost and hassle of septic system failure—get it inspected.

Preserve your investment, protect your family and your community. Keep your septic system working properly.

## Warning signs of septic system failure:

- **Foul odors and back up of sewage into the house**
- **Sewage or wet spots surfacing in the yard**
- **Slow-draining fixtures**

If any of these happen to you, contact a certified septic professional. If you have any questions on maintenance and operation of your septic system, call the Health Department for more information.

## Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department

3629 South D Street, MS 1035  
Tacoma, WA 98418-6813  
(253) 798-6470  
septicinfo@tpchd.org

For a list of certified septic professional companies:  
[www.tpchd.org/septicservicecompanies](http://www.tpchd.org/septicservicecompanies)

For a list of certified septic designers:  
[www.tpchd.org/designers](http://www.tpchd.org/designers)

For a list of certified septic installers:  
[www.tpchd.org/installers](http://www.tpchd.org/installers)

Find record drawing (as built) of your system:  
(253) 798-6577  
[www.tpchd.org/asbuilt.php](http://www.tpchd.org/asbuilt.php)

### Craft3

Nonprofit lender providing affordable loans with flexible qualification to cover the costs of designing, permitting, installing, and maintaining your failing septic system. Craft3 NMLS#390159

To learn more and apply:  
(877) 480-5765  
CleanWater@Craft3.org  
[www.Craft3.org/CleanWater](http://www.Craft3.org/CleanWater)

### Septic System Grant and Loan Project

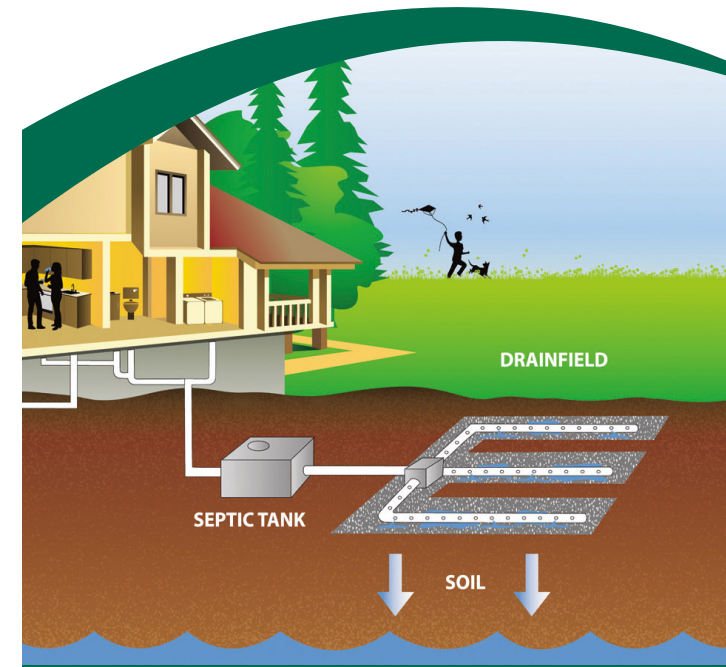
Low interest loan or grant money to help with septic repairs in unincorporated Pierce County.

To learn more and apply:  
(253) 798-2845  
rhanowell@tpchd.org



## Protect Your Home— And the Environment

On-Site Septic System Information for Homeowners

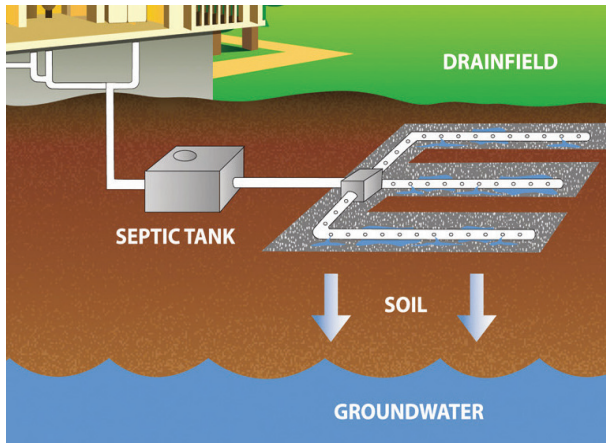


**Septic maintenance saves money—  
and prevents pollution**



**Septic System Care  
Begins With You**

# What is a septic system?



When a home is not connected to a public sewer system, an on-site septic system treats its sewage.

The system contains an underground septic tank that receives and settles out domestic sewage. From there, bacteria break down the domestic sewage where solids accumulate in the bottom as sludge, oils and grease accumulate on the top as scum.

The liquid called effluent between the sludge and scum flows (or is pumped) into a network of pipes called the drain field. Once in the drain field, the soil filters the liquid waste before it gets into the groundwater.

A home with a septic system should have an area set aside for a replacement known as a reserve area. This is an area the homeowner may use to replace or expand the drain field.

## Proper operation and maintenance are essential to the long-term performance of your septic system.

### Hire a professional

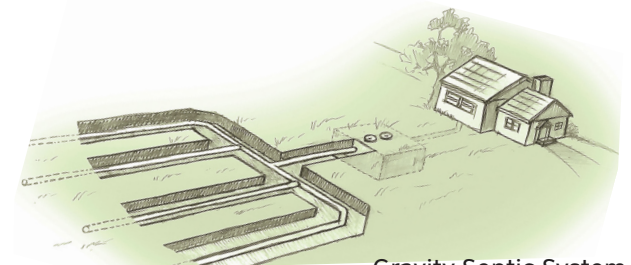
- You can't always see problems with your system. It's important to work with a certified septic professional to determine if your system is at risk for failure. Have your system **inspected**.

Types of systems	Frequency of inspection
Complex, proprietary/pre-treatment, large community and commercial, camps, self contained systems	yearly
Pressure distribution, gravity, mounds, small community drain fields, sand filters, off-site drain fields, duplexes (2 unit only), small commercials	every three years

- Health Department recommends you hire a certified septic professional to install risers on your tanks for easier access and to save money in the future. Discuss with your certified septic professional the benefits of installing risers.
- It is important to have your septic system **pumped** every three to five years or
  - » When your certified septic professional determines your tank needs to be pumped; or
  - » When your total scum and sludge is 18 inches or more.
- For a list of certified septic professionals visit [www.tpchd.org/septicservicecompanies](http://www.tpchd.org/septicservicecompanies).
  - » Contact a minimum of three companies to compare prices; and
  - » Ask if they offer discounts (senior, new customer, etc.).

### Do it yourself

- Keep records of your systems location and any repairs and pumpings.
- Spread heavier water use throughout the week.
- Fix water leaks and use water saving fixtures for shower and faucet heads, toilets and washing machines.
- Check the drain field and down slope areas routinely for odors, wet spots, or surfacing sewage.
- Keep roof and other drains away from the drain field.
- Avoid garbage disposal use. The disposal adds solids and grease to your system and may plug the drain field.
- Avoid allowing grease, hair, solid waste, and chemicals to go down the drain.
- Avoid using septic tank additives.
- Landscape your drain field with grass and plants with shallow roots. This helps absorb water, prevents soil erosion, and receives oxygen to help break down bacteria.
- Keep cars, heavy equipment and livestock off of the drain field. The pipes cannot support heavy loads and may burst under pressure.
- Do not construct patios, driveways, sport courts, fire pits, structures or use landscaping plastic over the drain field.



Gravity Septic System