

FAQ about septic tanks

The term septic tank can be used to refer to the following waste management systems.

A septic tank is a two or three chamber structure, which retains sewage from a property for sufficient time to allow solids to form into sludge at the base of the tank, where it is partially broken down by bacteria. The remaining liquid in the tank then drains from the tank by means of an outlet pipe and soakaway.

Domestic treatment plants are usually specialist GRP (glass reinforced plastic) units purchased to treat sewage to a higher standard than that achievable by a septic tank alone. These units usually have moving parts or need compressed air and as such need electrical connections. These units, like septic tanks, also discharge through an outlet pipe and soakaway.

A cesspool is a sealed tank connected to a property by a series of drains. It collects the sewage from a property and when it is full it has to be emptied and the waste water taken away by tanker to a proper disposal point. Cesspools do not have an outlet pipe

What is a septic tank?

A septic tank is used to treat and dispose of small volumes of wastewater, usually from single houses or a number of households that are located relatively close together. Septic tanks are usually installed where there is no access to the mains drainage network.

Why do I need to empty my septic tank?

Some of the settled solids (sludge) at the bottom of your septic tank will be digested by the anaerobic action of the bacteria and will disappear. The remaining sludge will build up over time and will need to be pumped out of the tank. Your septic tank won't be totally emptied but "desludged".

How often needs my tank need emptying?

Your tank should be emptied or "desludged" following the manufacturer's recommendations. For septic tanks, empty the tank when the level of sludge reaches 50% of the tank's volume. For sewage treatment plants, empty the primary tank when the level of sludge reaches 30% of the primary tanks total volume.

Why do septic tanks fail?

Most septic tank failures are related to inappropriate maintenance; examples being when soil-based disposal such as soakaways are installed in inadequate ground conditions, on excessive slopes or in areas with high ground water tables... Poor maintenance such as

irregular septic tank emptying may cause solids in the tank to block the soakaway and clog the complete system.

What items should not be put down the toilets if I am connected to a septic system?

Avoid pouring bleach into the toilet or into sinks. Limit the amount of fat disposed of to a minimum. Your septic tank is a biological solution for treating biological waste. Avoid putting the following items into your toilets or sinks: coffee grounds, disposable diapers, animal litter, hygiene products and sanitary items, cigarette ends, fats and greases, paper towels, paints, detergents and pesticides....these products may have a negative impact on the bacteria in your septic tank.

I have a smell issue with my septic tank: what is going wrong and who should I contact?

If you have bad smells from your septic tank, this may be a sign that the biomass has died. First find out what may have killed the biomass, this is likely to be a product you have poured down your sink or toilet. If this is the case you may have to add bacteria to the septic tank.

For any problem related to your septic tank or if your system needs servicing or emptying please contact your local septic tank specialist.

Why does my septic tank have a scum on top?

This scum consists of FOG "Fat, Oil and Grease" from daily domestic activities such as cooking washing up etc. The enzymes will break down this scum over time. The scum in your primary tank can dry out and get too thick, stopping the air reaching the liquid effluent. The bacteria need oxygen for the aerobic degradation of the pollutants in the sewage. A hard and dry scum (crust) means that it is the right time to get in a contractor to desludge your septic tank.

For the legal stuff go to

<https://www.gov.uk/permits-you-need-for-septic-tanks/overview>