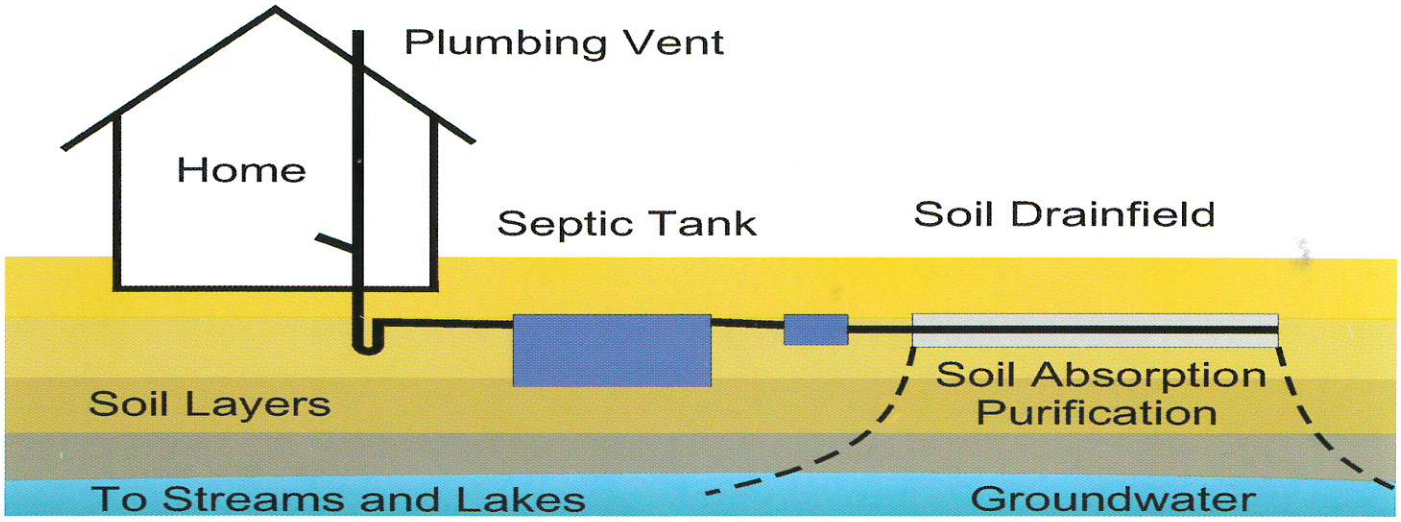
Georgia Department of Public Health

Department of Public Health
Environmental Health Section

Understanding Your Septic System
A Homeowner's Guide

Basic Septic System Components



Permit Number: _____

Applicant: _____

Property Owner: _____

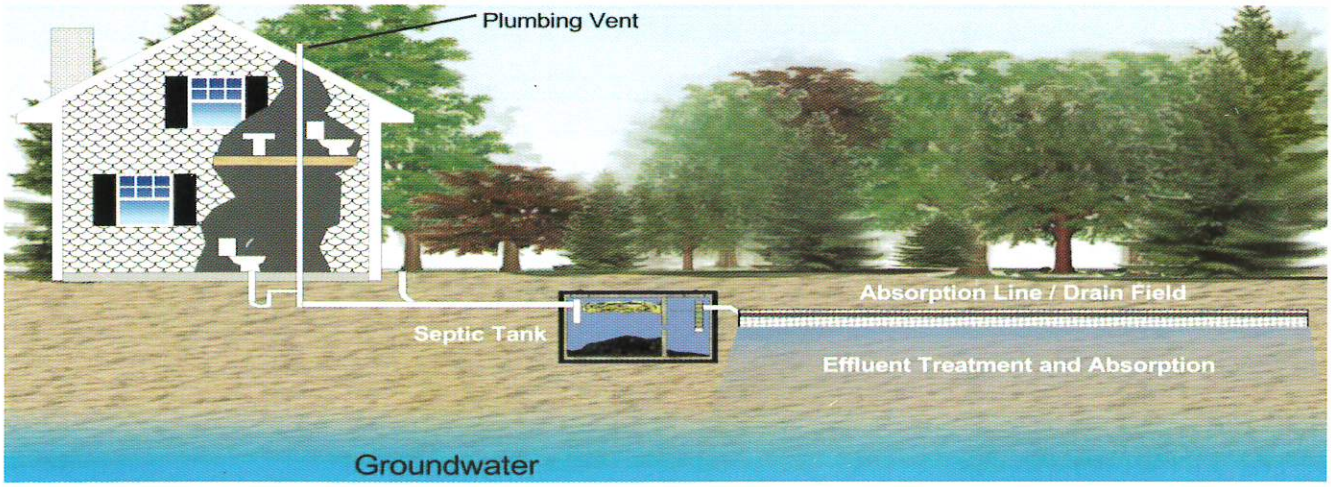
Construction Address: _____

Subdivision: _____

Lot Number: _____

Comments: _____

We Protect Lives.



Components:
A typical septic system has four main components: plumbing from the home, a septic tank, a drainfield, and the soil.

Plumbing from the home
All of your household wastewater exits your home through a pipe to the septic tank. The sewage gas from the system is vented through a plumbing vent. In addition, a "clean out" within the pipe is usually located between the house and septic tank.

Septic tank
The septic tank is a buried, watertight container typically made of concrete, fiberglass, or plastic. It holds the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle out (forming sludge) and oil and grease to float to the surface (as scum). It also allows partial decomposition of the solid materials. Double compartments and a T-shaped outlet in the septic tank prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the drainfield area. A filter are also required to keep solids from entering the drainfield. Risers with lids at the ground surface or within 12 inches below the ground surface allow easy location, inspection, and pumping of the tank. Septic tank additives are not recommended and may cause harm. Tanks should be pumped every 3 to 5 years.

Drainfield
The wastewater exits the septic tank and is discharged into the drainfield for further treatment by bacteria in the soil. The partially treated wastewater is pushed farther along into the drainfield for treatment every time new wastewater enters the tank. A typical drainfield consists of a series of pipes with holes and covered with gravel and soil. However, a drainfield could be an alternative disposal system consisting of chambers; polystyrene bundles; polyethylene pipe bundles; biopeat or sand. The type of drainfield components may vary based on the conditions of the lot. Please be advised that neither septic tank additives nor jetting are recommended for your drainfield.

Soil
Septic tank wastewater that flows from the drainfield percolates into the soil. The soil provides final treatment by removing harmful bacteria, viruses, and nutrients. Suitable soil is necessary for successful wastewater treatment. Soil can become clogged over time and a new drainfield will be necessary.

Insert
On-Site Sewage Management System
Documents in the pocket below

System Failures and Probable Causes

Sewage backing up in house	Leaking fixtures, blockage in house plumbing; pump failure; improper system design; tree roots clogging pipes
Sewage surfacing in yard	Excess water use; system blockage; drainfield damaged; undersized System; pump failure
Sewage odors in hours	Damaged or blocked plumbing vent; sewage back up in house; unsealed sump pump; dry p-trap
Sewage odors outside	Sewage surfacing in yard; neighbor's system failure; septic tank risers; damaged or missing lids
Contaminated drinking water	Well too close to drainfield; surface discharge of sewage; improper well construction; broken water supply line; broken sewage lines
Pump alarms frequently	Pump failure; fuse or breaker tripped; pump unplugged or turned off; controls malfunctioning

- **Any repair work performed on an on-site sewage management system requires a repair permit from the local county Health Department.**

- **If possible, it is recommended that you obtain at least three quotes from several State Certified Contractors prior to getting work performed on your septic system. Prices for services are not regulated and may vary greatly from contractor to contractor.**

Contact your local Environmental Health Department for a Copy of the Final Inspection

The Do's and Don'ts for Onsite Sewage Management Systems

Conventional Septic Tank & Absorption System

*Note the large area needed for your primary drainfield, as well as the replacement area in the event of a failure. Please protect these areas as recommended in the following "Do" and "Don't " lists.

To view an educational video, please visit our website at: www.georgiaeh.us.

Do:

1. Call your local Health Department with any questions concerning the function and maintenance of your septic system.
2. Have your septic tank pumped every 3 to 5 years as recommended by the Georgia Department of Public Health's Environmental Health Section.
3. Conserve Water by staggering wash loads, installing low flow fixtures, and repairing leaky fixtures and faucets.
4. Divert water away from the septic system by using gutters and downspouts whenever possible.
5. Insure that anyone working on your septic system is state certified.
6. Keep records of system installation and maintenance activities performed on your septic system.
7. Protect your drainfield and repair area by not parking, driving or building permanent structures over these areas.

Don't:

1. Park or drive over your septic tank, drainfield or repair area.
2. Plant anything over the absorption field but grass.
3. Use septic tank additives.
4. Jet your drainfield.
5. Use a garbage disposal unless your system was designed for it.
6. Build any structures over the septic system or drainfield repair area (sheds, garages, driveways, etc.)
7. Use your septic system to dispose of inappropriate wastes:
   A. Inert Materials - plastics, rubber, scouring pads, cigarette filters, bandages, etc.
   B. Food Wastes - fats, oils and grease, coffee grounds, melon rinds, egg shells, etc.
   C. Paper Products – baby wipes, scented toilet tissue, feminine hygiene products, condoms, cotton balls, etc.
   D. Chemicals –paint or paint thinner, solvents, automotive fluids, fuels, pesticides, etc.