



# How well do you know your septic system?

## How does my septic system work?

A conventional septic system usually has two components that ensure the purification of wastewater from residences: the septic tank and the septic field.

The septic tank has two compartments which allow solid particles to settle to the bottom (sludge) and oils and fats at the surface (scum) through bacterial activity. Then, the septic field continues the filtering. Several pipes slowly let the water run into the ground. The latter's filtering function and other microorganisms continue to clean the water.

## How to properly maintain my septic system?

Several behaviors and habits can maximize the life of your installation.

### Water consumption

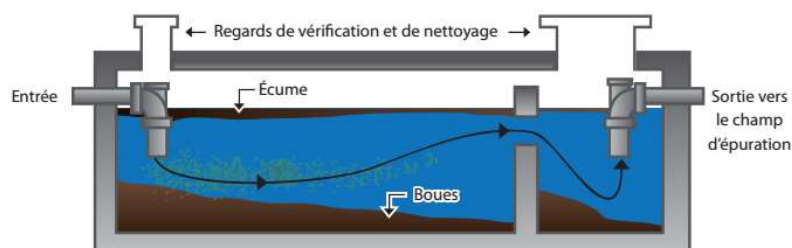
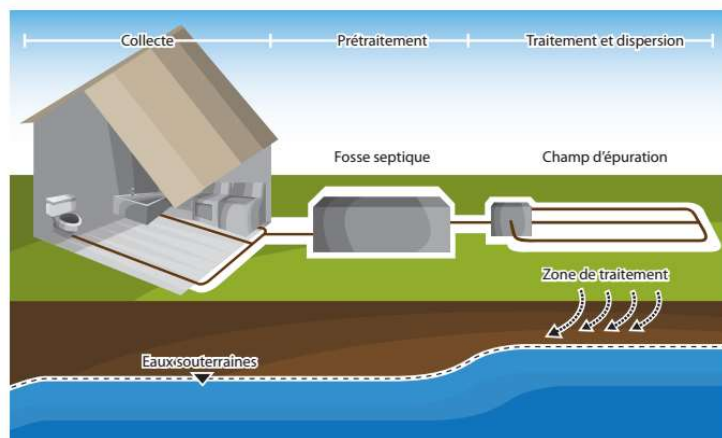
Too much water consumption accelerates circulation in the tank and prevents separation of sludge and scum.

- Alternate the times allotted for showers, washing clothes and dishes.
- Install water saving devices on plumbing fixtures.

### Land use

- Keep elements away that could compact the soil (shed, pool, spa, entrance and car traffic) and trees or shrubs whose roots can damage the installation.
- The backwash from your water softener and the water from gutters and the pool must not be sent to the septic tank

References and pictures: Ville de Sherbrooke et ROBVO



### Products

- Do not put substances that do not decompose or do so very slowly (oils, fats, tampons, hair, tissues, etc.) in the septic system. These products are likely to clog the septic field. In addition, garbage disposals under sinks should be avoided.
- Cleaners and chemicals such as bleach, paint, solvents and disinfectants should be avoided. Instead, choose biodegradable and phosphate-free products.



- Some companies have developed products (enzymes, bacteria, etc.) to improve the efficiency of the septic tank or the septic field. According to the environment ministry, these additives are not necessary and may even be harmful.

### Why should I clean my pre-filter?

All septic tanks built since 2009 are required to be equipped with a pre-filter. It is located inside the second compartment, near the waste water exit. If your tank has a pre-filter, remember to clean it with a garden hose after emptying of the tank to reduce the risk of clogging.

### How can I ensure the performance of my septic system?

If you see one of these signs of malfunction, call a specialist immediately:

- Grass over the septic field is exceptionally green and spongy.
- Water drains more slowly through the pipes (toilet, sink, etc.).
- A sewage smell coming from pipes or ditches.
- A gray or black liquid on the surface of your land.
- Overflow traces are visible around the lids of the septic tank.
- The analysis of your well water or the neighbor well water reveals bacterial contamination.

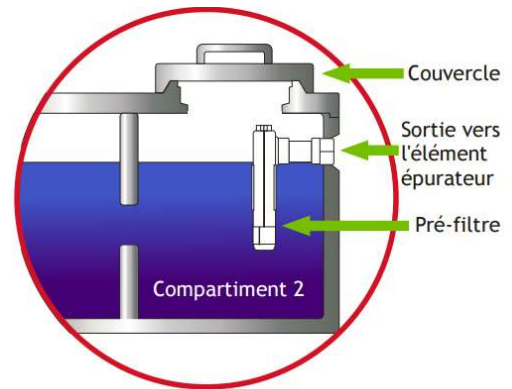
### Well owner?



Your water may be clear, odorless and taste good to drink, but contain bacteria and chemicals that may affect your health.

Make sure that you test your water regularly for the presence of these contaminants.

For more information, visit «*La qualité de l'eau de mon puits*» on the website of the Minister of the Environment: [www.mddelcc.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mddelcc.gouv.qc.ca)



### What is the impact of my septic system on the environment?

When a septic system is defective or misused (ex. by rejecting excess water or non-recommended products), treatment is less effective.

Thus, when the treatment does not work well, water full of contaminants (ex. Phosphorus or nitrogen) is rejected into nature and pollutes bodies of water which results in the proliferation of algae (ex. cyanobacteria) and aquatic plants.



In addition, discharges of fecal coliform exceeding standards can cause health risks.

Even if your septic system is not near a stream, it can still have an impact on them. Indeed, ditches and groundwater that are contaminated by septic systems will sooner or later reach the stream.

**Remember that before undertaking any kind of work on your septic system, it is necessary to contact the Municipal environment inspector who has all the information regarding conditions to be respected.**

