

Why is it important to properly maintain my septic tank?

It saves you money.

Malfunctioning systems can cost \$3,000-\$7,000 to repair or replace compared to maintenance costs of about \$250-\$500 every three to five years.

It protects the value of your home.

Malfunctioning septic systems can drastically reduce property values, hamper the sale of your home, and even pose a legal liability.

It keeps your water clean and safe.

A properly maintained system helps keep your family's drinking water pure, and reduces the risk of contaminating community, local, and regional waters.

It keeps the environment clean.

Malfunctioning septic systems can contaminate local waterways with bacteria and other disease-causing organisms.

How do I know if my septic system is not working properly?

Mind the Signs!

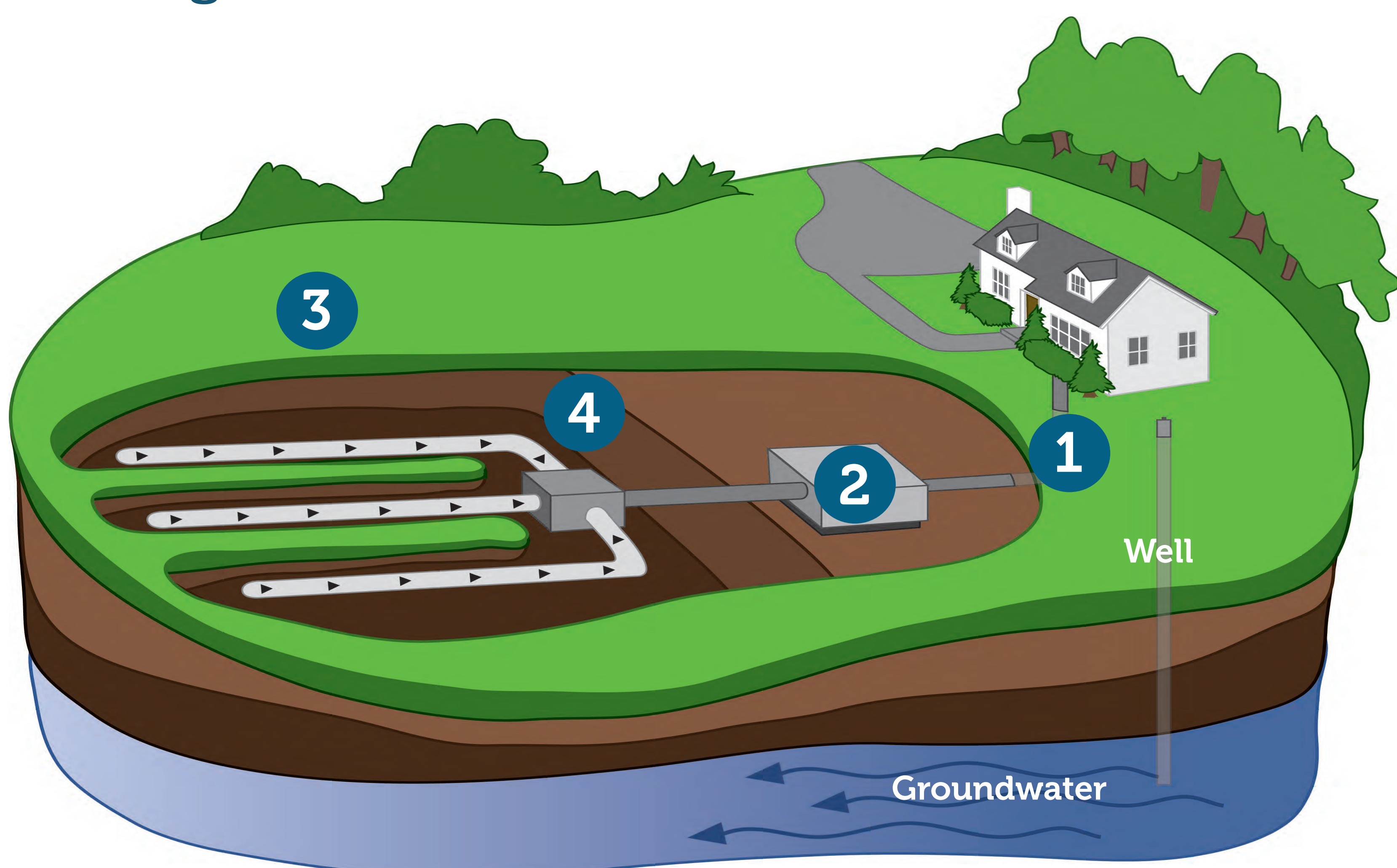
Here are a few signs of septic system malfunction. If you discover any of these warning signs, call your health department immediately. One call could save you thousands of dollars.

- Wastewater backing up into household drains.
- A strong odor around the septic tank and drainfield.
- Bright green, spongy grass appearing on the drainfield, even during dry weather.

How does a septic system work?

This is a simplified overview of how a septic system works.

- 1** All water runs out of your house from one main drainage pipe into a septic tank.
- 2** The septic tank is a buried, water-tight container usually made of concrete, fiberglass or polyethylene. Its job is to hold the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle down to the bottom (forming sludge), while the oil and grease floats to the top (as scum). Compartments and a T-shaped outlet prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the drainfield area.
- 3** The liquid wastewater then exits the tank into the drainfield. If the drainfield is overloaded with too much liquid, it will flood, causing sewage to flow to the ground surface or create backups in toilets and sinks.
- 4** Finally, the wastewater percolates into the soil, naturally removing harmful bacteria, viruses, and nutrients.



Do Your Part, Be SepticSmart

The Do's and Don'ts of Your Septic System

Learn these simple steps to protect your home, health, environment and property value:



Protect It and Inspect It:

Do:

- Have your system inspected (in general) every three years by the Health Department and have the tank pumped, when necessary, generally every three to five years.

Think at the Sink:

Don't:

- Pour cooking grease or oil down the sink or toilet.
- Rinse coffee grounds into the sink.
- Pour household chemicals down the sink or flush them.

Do:

- Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal.
- Properly dispose of coffee grounds and food.
- Put grease in a container to harden before discarding in the trash.

Don't Overload the Commode:

Don't:

- Flush non-degradable products or chemicals, such as feminine hygiene products, condoms, dental floss, diapers, cigarette butts, cat litter, paper towels, and pharmaceuticals.

Do:

- Dispose of these items in the trash can!

Shield Your Field:

Don't:

- Park or drive on your drainfield. The weight can damage the drain lines.
- Plant trees or shrubs too close to your drainfield; roots can grow into your system and clog it.

Do:

- Consult a septic service professional to advise you of the proper distance for planting trees and shrubs, depending on your septic tank location.

Don't Strain Your Drain:

Don't:

- Concentrate your water use by using your dishwasher, shower, washing machine, and toilet at the same time. All that extra water can really strain your septic system.

Do:

- Stagger the use of water-generating appliances. This can be helpful especially if your system has not been pumped in a long time.
- Become more water efficient by fixing plumbing leaks and consider installing bathroom and kitchen faucet aerators and water-efficient products.

For more SepticSmart tips, visit: www.epa.gov/septicSMART