

SELECTING A HOMESITE

What you should know about onsite sewage disposal

The septic tank system is the most common onsite sewage disposal system. Almost half of all Alabamians use a septic tank system to safely dispose of household sewage. The homeowner who understands this system and its proper use and care should have many years of trouble free service. Improper use or neglect may cause premature problems or unnecessary expense.

Buying A Lot For Your Home

Before buying land on which to build your home, check to see if the property is served by a city or central sewer system. If it is not, you need to know if the property has suitable site for a septic tank system. If soil tests have been performed, secure this information. Also, make sure the size of the lot will accommodate the septic system, as well as, a replacement area for future use. The local health department can help you determine if the lot has met the minimum size required.

If you are buying a subdivision lot, be sure to ask your local county health department if the developer has obtained final approval to show the adequate provisions have been made for sewage disposal, water supply, and solid waste disposal before you buy!

As a property owner you should be aware that you must submit an APPLICATION FOR A PERMIT TO INSTALL AN ONSITE SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEM to your local health department. If this application is complete and meets all requirements you will receive an approved PERMIT TO INSTALL. Upon receipt of this permit your contractor or installer can then install your onsite sewage disposal system.

Items to Consider

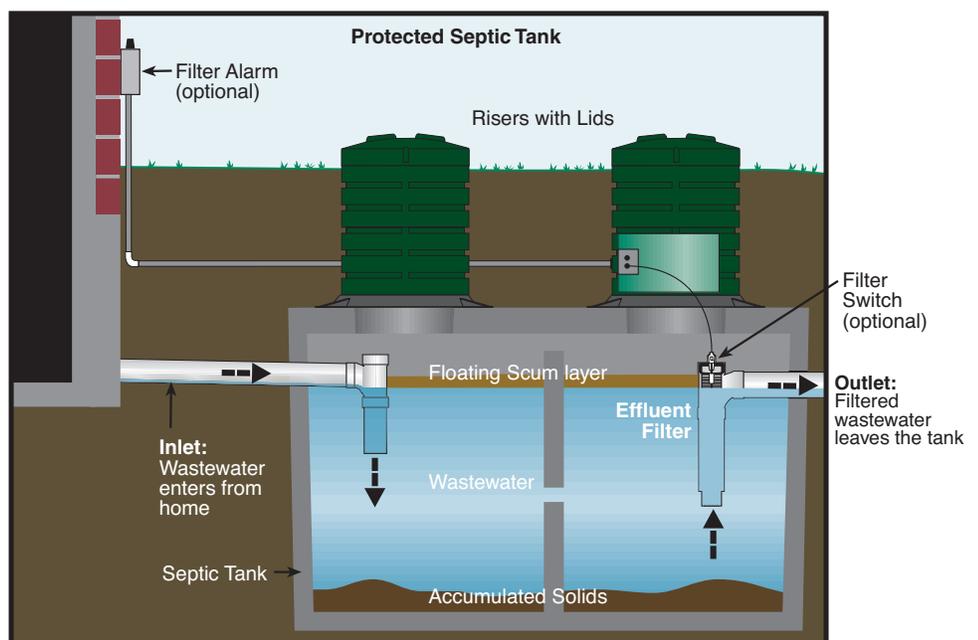
Soil suitability, high seasonable ground water, lake or stream closeness, flooding frequency, slope or steepness of land and availability of a safe and adequate water supply are among the items you should consider before you locate your home and before you start to build. Your local health department along with professional soil classifiers and professional engineers can advise you should you have any questions about your lot or property.

Don't Buy Land

Don't buy land - that is, until you have considered all of the above noted items. Just because adjacent land is apparently suitable for an onsite sewage disposal system does not necessarily mean yours will be. Soils can change within a short distance. **MANY ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR ONSITE SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS.** It's cheaper to check before you buy!!!

The Septic Tank System

A septic tank system consists of (1) a watertight concrete, plastic, or fiberglass septic tank for receiving the untreated household sewage and (2) a soil absorption area (field lines) for permitting the liquid wastes to be absorbed in the soil. While the sewage is held in the septic tank, the heavy solids settle to the bottom of the tank. During this time, micro-organisms digest the solids without the aid of oxygen (anaerobic) the lighter solids, fats, and oils float to the top of the tank and form a scum layer. After the solids have settled and have been digested by the micro-organisms in the septic tank, the liquid (effluent) flows out of the tank into a series of perforated pipes. These pipes allow distribution of the liquid into the soil which then filters and treats the waste by the action of soil bacteria.



Locating The Sewage Disposal System

The sewage disposal system must be installed at the same location the soils tests were performed. The information on the application form will aid local health departments in determining the proper size septic tank and length of field lines for the disposal system. A 100% expansion (secondary) area is designed to be available in the event of a failure of the septic tank system. The septic tank system must be located a specified distance from wells, surface waters and easements. Contact your health department environmentalist for these directions.

A record of the location of your septic tank system should be kept with your other home papers or should be stapled to your utility room wall.

Maintenance of the Sewage Disposal System

To ensure that your septic tank is working properly, it should be inspected once every two to three years. With ordinary use and care, a septic tank usually requires pumping out every three to five years.

Pumping is needed to clean out solids that build up inside your septic tank. If not removed these solids may eventually clog up the soil absorption system (field lines). This could result in septic tank failure. Surfacing sewage is a public health hazard since it may contain harmful bacteria and viruses.

Septic tanks should be pumped out by a licensed septic tank service. Septic tank pumpers must possess a license from the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board (AOWB) to pump septic tanks and dispose of the septage in an approved manner. When the septic tank is pumped, the date should be recorded and kept with other materials concerning the septic tank.

Additives are not needed to aid or accelerate the decomposition in the septic tank. Some chemicals can actually be harmful to the tank and absorption system and may contaminate you or your neighbor's well and groundwater.

RULES TO REMEMBER

Because Preventive Maintenance Is Cheaper Than Repair

DO: Contact your local health department environmentalist for information on the proper procedure to obtain an application to install your onsite sewage disposal system if the property you are planning to buy is not served by a city or central sewer system.

DO: Record the location of your septic tank and field lines.

DO: Divert surface waters and roof drains away from your septic tank and field lines.

DO: Have your septic tank inspected and pumped every 3 to 5 years by a licensed septic tank pumper to avoid problems.

DO: Call your local county health department's environmentalist for a permit and advice before you have repairs made on your system or in the event of a septic tank failure.

DON'T: Overload the septic tank with kitchen solids or grease.

DON'T: Flush large objects down the toilet. It is best not to use a garbage grinder.

DON'T: Put lye, paint thinner, insecticides or other harsh chemicals into the system.

DON'T: Place building, driveways, patios, swimming pools, or other structures near or over your septic tank or field lines.

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Alabama Department of Public Health

Division of Community Environmental Protection • Onsite Sewage Branch