

# What is A Septic System?

Households that are not on a public sewer system may use an on-lot septic system to dispose of their wastewater. Household wastewater contains all the wastes from our homes, including toilet use, bathroom and kitchen use, laundry, and other activities. It contains human waste, detergents, chemicals, grease, oils, and many other substances. If not treated properly, these substances can travel through soil and potentially contaminate groundwater and/or local waterways.

Most systems have three components:

- **Septic Tank** – Tanks can be constructed from plastic, fiberglass, or concrete. Tank size and specifications are determined by state regulation, and systems are permitted and approved by local agencies.
- **Drainfield** – a drainfield is constructed from a series of perforated pipes buried in gravel- filled trenches in the soil. When wastewater enters the septic tank, an equal amount (known as *effluent*) is forced into the drainfield for treatment.
- **Soil** – the soil encompassing the trenches treats the wastewater by allowing infiltration of the liquids to neutralize most of the pollutants. The effluent eventually is incorporated into groundwater.

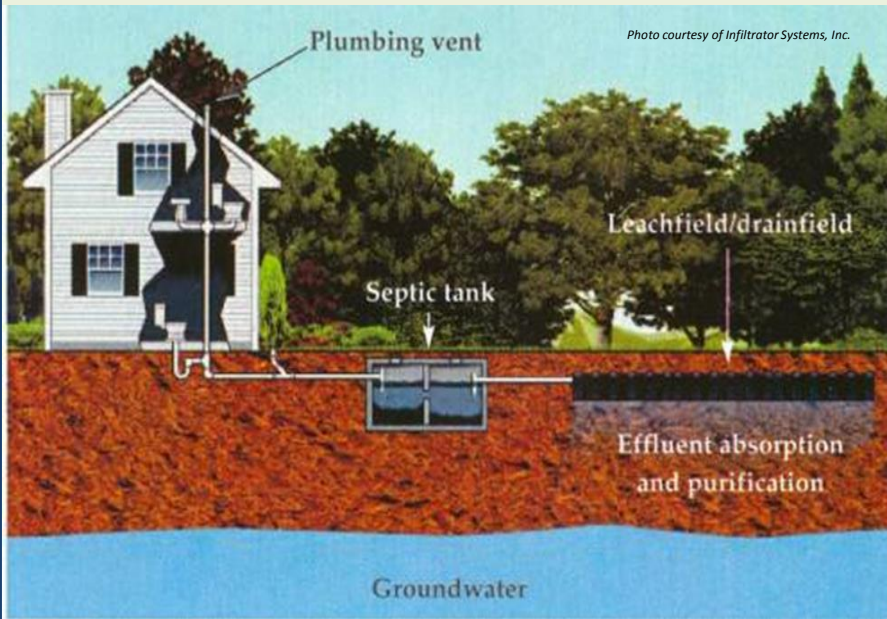


Photo courtesy of Infiltrator Systems, Inc.

## For more information

**On-lot Sewage Program**  
[http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgt/wqp/wqp\\_wm/FACTS/pa1607.htm](http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgt/wqp/wqp_wm/FACTS/pa1607.htm)

**On-lot Wastewater Systems: Basics**  
<http://extension.psu.edu/natural-resources/water/septic-systems/on-lot-sewage-systems>

**On-lot System Operation and Maintenance**  
[http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgt/wqp/wqp\\_wm/facts/pa1608.htm](http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgt/wqp/wqp_wm/facts/pa1608.htm)

**Water Wellness Seminar**  
[http://files.dep.state.pa.us/EnvironmentalEd/Environmental%20Education/EnvEdPortalFiles/DEP\\_At\\_Home/Water\\_Wellness/Onlot\\_Sewage\\_Systems\\_Presentation\\_Sept2012.pdf](http://files.dep.state.pa.us/EnvironmentalEd/Environmental%20Education/EnvEdPortalFiles/DEP_At_Home/Water_Wellness/Onlot_Sewage_Systems_Presentation_Sept2012.pdf)

# Caring for your System

Remember that the Homeowner is responsible for the care and maintenance of the septic system! Here are some ideas to keep your system in top shape:

- Inspect the entire system every 1 to 3 years to ensure good working order.
- Pump the solids from the tank every three (3) years to avoid overflowing and failing tanks.
- Keep service and pumping records handy.
- Repair the system as soon as trouble signs appear, such as sluggish toilets, sewer odors, spongy ground around septic tank, or raw sewage backups.
- Conserve water and follow directions to prevent malfunctions.
- If you use a private supply, ensure safe drinking water by periodically testing the water.

Visit the PA Department of Environmental Protection website for more information at [http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgt/wqp/wqp\\_wm/FACTS/pa1607.htm](http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgt/wqp/wqp_wm/FACTS/pa1607.htm)

## Septic System Maintenance Record

Date	Company	Service	Comments

# CITIZEN'S GUIDE

## Protecting Your Drinking Water



## Berks County Source Water Protection Program

### A Program By:

Berks County Water & Sewer Association  
 Center for Excellence in Local Government  
 c/o Albright College  
<http://www.albright.edu/localgov/bcwsa/index.html>

### For More Information Contact:

Berks County Conservation District  
 1238 County Welfare Road, Suite 200  
 Leesport, PA 19533  
 610-372-4657  
[www.berkscd.com](http://www.berkscd.com)



## A Message from the Berks County Source Water Protection Committee

Everyone uses local water sources every day, but do you know where your water really comes from?

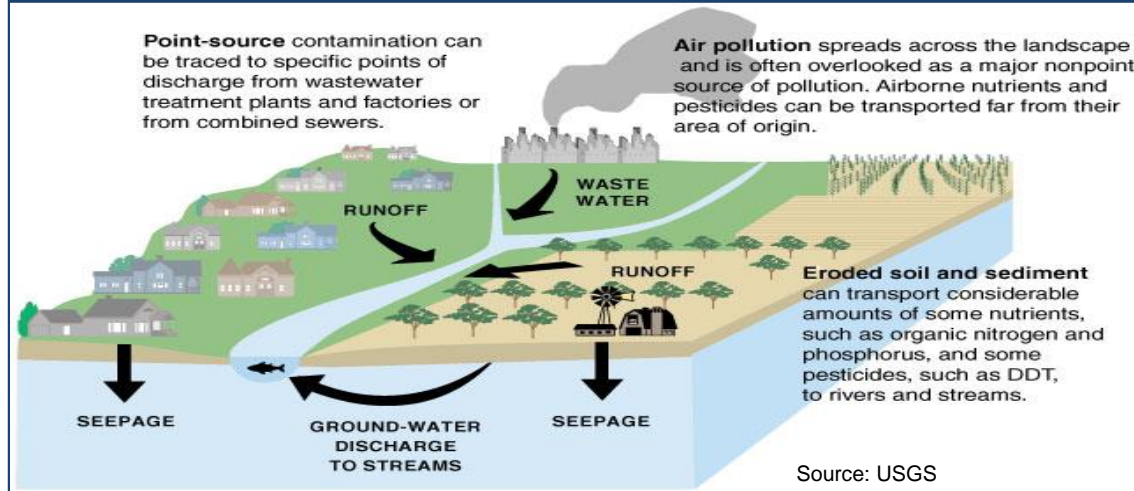
The staff at your water utility work around the clock to provide top quality water to every tap. Wastewater facilities work hard to discharge water that meets regulations and protects your water resources, which are the heart of your community, your way of life and your children's future. To maintain a clean, dependable water supply, they need your help!

This brochure was developed to make your community aware of the importance of protecting your water supply. Once a water source becomes contaminated, the cleanup often takes many years and can be very expensive. It is in our community's best interest to take the proper precautions to prevent contaminants from entering our water supply.

Who is responsible for protecting your drinking water? EVERYONE! Whether you use a public supply or a private source, we are all connected to the same water!

If you have any questions about source water protection in your area, please contact the Berks County Water & Sewer Association at [BCWSA@alb.edu](mailto:BCWSA@alb.edu), or visit the BCWSA website at <https://www.albright.edu/localgov/bcwsa/index.html> for more information.

## Examples of Source Water Contamination



**Water utilities obtain your drinking water from a variety of sources, such as a groundwater well, spring, surface reservoir, river, or creek.** Source water protection can help prevent your drinking water from becoming polluted by managing possible sources of contamination in the watershed. Everyone has an important part to play in protecting drinking water – today and for the future. Source water protection is a community effort – we hope you will read this and other information forwarded to you, and help protect our water supply.



**Why do water sources sometimes become polluted?** A water supply can become polluted when substances that are harmful to human health enter the groundwater, rivers, reservoir, or springs. Common pollutants include gasoline or oil from leaking tanks, nitrate and pesticides from agriculture and lawns, pathogens from livestock and pet waste, salt from winter road maintenance, and chemicals from industrial facilities. Once drinking water is contaminated, it must be treated or abandoned as a drinking water source. The expense of treating polluted water or finding a new source of drinking water can be avoided through source water protection.

## Ways to Help

### What can you do?

- Pump out your septic system every three years, or as required by local ordinance. Look under “Septic Tanks” in the Yellow Pages to find a contractor.
- Minimize the use of pesticides and herbicides on your lawn and garden.
- If you drill a new well, make sure the old one is properly closed and abandoned, and periodically test the new water.
- Do not dump swimming pool water into a creek or storm drain at the end of the season. If possible, direct the water into the sanitary sewer. Otherwise, wait until the chlorine diminishes and then direct pool water onto grass, forest, or other natural area.
- Remember: anything you throw or store on the ground can find its way into the water supply. Store and handle chemicals properly.
- Dispose of motor oil at a garage that will recycle it. Never pour oil on the ground or in a storm drain or sewer on the street.
- Bring household hazardous waste – such as paint, varnishes, and other chemicals – to a Berks County waste collection event. Check for dates on this website: <http://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/SWA/Pages/default.aspx>
- Do not flush medications or pour down the drain, as they may affect groundwater and private wells. Dispose of these at a Berks County collection event.
- Call the PA Department of Environmental Protection office at **(877) 333-1904** immediately if you observe a chemical spill.

*This brochure has been funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Source Water Protection Technical Assistance Program.*

