

Septic Inspection and Pumping Guide

Keep these tips in mind when you get your septic tank pumped.

It is important to know when to pump your tank. Septic tanks collect and process wastewater solids, while the liquids (effluent) flow out into the drainfield. Over time, sludge and scum build up and need to be pumped out. If the sludge and scum are not pumped out, these solids build up and overflow to the drainfield, causing your drainfield to clog and fail.

Replacing a drainfield can cost thousands of dollars and requires a permit from Thurston County.

A septic tank **INSPECTION** typically costs between \$100 and \$200. Getting your tank **PUMPED** usually costs between \$250 and \$400. Your tank will need to be uncovered (dug up) to inspect it and pump it out. You can do this yourself, or pay the pumper to do it. The cost for uncovering the tank varies depending on depth, but can be between \$50 and \$250.

The cost of pumping a pump chamber (if your system has a pump in it) depends on the size of the pump chamber.

Since prices vary, get estimates from several pumpers. Ask: Who uncovers the tank? What is the inspection charge? Pumping charge? Is there a per gallon charge? Price is not always the best indicator of service quality, so speak with friends and neighbors for recommendations.

Consider having **RISERS** installed. Risers are raised access hatches with lids that enable access to the septic tank without digging. Risers need to be very sturdy, and are not cheap, but they make inspections and maintenance easier and less disruptive.

When you get your tank pumped, ask the pumper to recommend when your tank should be pumped next. Ask if you could have waited longer or waited too long. Write this information down!

Once you have learned your pumping schedule, be aware that as households grow and change, so does water usage. Greater water usage may require a more frequent pumping schedule. More people in a home, teenagers, or a home business can increase water usage.

No need for additives... normal use makes your system work fine! Despite advertisers' claims, septic additives never eliminate the need to pump out the tank!

Get informed. Attend a septic workshop or visit our website and view one of the "Understanding and Maintaining Your Septic System" videos, www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehoss.

Pumping Pointers

1. The pumper should pump both compartments of a two-chamber tank. All tanks installed after the mid-1970s should have two chambers.
2. The contents should be pumped out through the main lids, not the baffle (the pipe that goes down into the liquid).

3. The tank should be thoroughly emptied from both compartments, and rinsed out; there is no need to leave "starter" materials behind.
4. On the outlet of newer systems (since 1995), there should be an effluent filter to protect the drainfield. During pumping, the filter should be removed and rinsed over the tank. Filters should be cleaned at least once a year.
5. If you have a pressurized system, have the pump and pump chamber inspected and pumped (to the pump truck, not the drainfield) if there is even a little sludge in it. Float switches or control panel switches should only be changed or adjusted by a septic system installer or monitoring specialist.
6. While pumping or inspecting your septic system, pumpers may identify other problems. Pumpers can do minor repairs, such as repairing or replacing a broken baffle. We recommend you **get a second opinion for any repair estimated to cost more than \$200**. Keep in mind that it takes several days to refill the tank, so you have time to get estimates.
7. Be sure to get a receipt and a report for all work performed, signed and dated with the company name. Keep the information for your records.

If you have any questions about these guidelines, or need more information, **call the Thurston County Septic Help Line at 360-867-2669**; TDD line 360-867-2603.