

## Maintaining Your On-Site Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS)

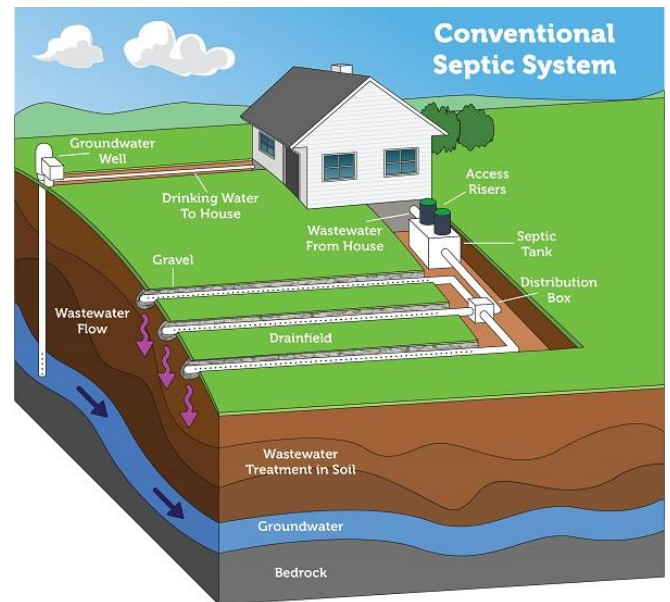
### A Homeowner's Guide

#### How an OWTS works:

An OWTS, commonly referred to as a "septic system" collects, treats, and distributes household wastewater (or effluent) into the ground. A typical OWTS consists of two parts: a tank and a Soil Treatment Area (STA). The tank retains any solids in the wastewater and allows for anaerobic treatment to kill some of the effluent's harmful bacteria.

Next, the effluent leaves the tank and enters the STA. The STA is also referred to as a "drain bed" or "leach lines". Once the effluent has reached the STA, it filters through the soil which provides even more purification of the water.

Lastly, it absorbs all the way down to the existing ground water.



Please note: Septic systems vary. Diagram is not to scale.

Don't know if a property has an OWTS? Find out with one of the following.

- Check the yard for lids/manhole covers.
- Check for "\$0 for Sewer Amount charged" on a water bill or property tax bill.
- Contact the Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment for OWTS questions.
- Contact an OWTS provider to help locate it.
- Visit the Pueblo County Assessor website to view the permit and drawings.

<https://county.pueblo.org/assessor/assessor-home>

#### Routine maintenance is crucial to maximizing the lifespan of your system

Think of an OWTS as an investment in the home and in the safety of the community and environment. Routine maintenance can catch any potential problems early on before they turn into larger problems. By taking steps every year to care for an OWTS, homeowners are likely to save hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars for repairs and/or replacements. This includes routine pumping and being mindful of how much stress is being put on the system.

#### Every OWTS is different.

Learn what kind of OWTS is in the home and what maintenance it requires. If homeowners don't know what type of system they have, call Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment at 719-583-4307.



## The tank should be pumped approximately every three to five years.

Your system should be inspected at least that often. The more often it's inspected, the better the chances are that you'll catch a problem early and potentially save you thousands.

### Why is a properly functioning septic system important?

**Protect the environment:** A failing system can release raw sewage, nitrates, phosphates, and improperly disposed of chemicals into the ground, which eventually leads to contamination of groundwater or other local water sources.

**Protect your health and the community:** When bacteria and viruses from improperly treated sewage contaminate drinking sources, it can cause outbreaks of illness, such as diarrhea, hepatitis, and typhoid fever. Some of these illnesses can be life-threatening.

**Protect your investment:** A failing system is equivalent to throwing money down the toilet, literally. Doing preventive maintenance, such as implementing everyday “septic smart” choices, scheduling an OWTS inspection, cleaning or pumping by a professional at recommended intervals, a homeowner can save thousands of dollars.



## Septic Smart Choices: Protect the tank and treatment area

### Don't

- Flush paper towels, cigarette butts, cat litter, disposable diapers, wipes (baby or flushable), feminine hygiene products, plastics, medications, dental floss, cotton, coffee grounds, paint, chemical drain cleaner, large amounts of household cleaners (bleach), thinners, solvents, poisons, pesticides, grease or cooking oil.
- Allow children to play on septic tank manhole covers, as the underside of the concrete covers may crumble and weaken due to gases created within the tank.
- Add commercial septic system additives.
- Drive heavy equipment over the STA.
- Dig in, build on or cover the STA with concrete or blacktop.
- Allow livestock to compact soil in STA.

### Do

- Conserve water during showers, laundry, and dishwashing.
- Space out heavy water usage over several days.
- Limit harsh cleaners that go down drains.
- Decrease and/or compost food waste that would end up in the septic tank.
- Dispose of medications and chemicals properly by contacting PDPHE for more information.
- Schedule inspections and tank cleanings every three years.
- Map STA location.
- Divert run-off from roof drains, sump pump drains and other sources from pooling over the STA.
- Plant non-irrigated, native grass on the STA.

## What is a failing OWTS?

A failure in a OWTS means that there a problem with the system that is not letting wastewater move through it properly. Some common causes of failure are clogs/settling in the pipes, the STA being oversaturated, or the tank being too full.

### Signs of OWTS Failure:

- Pooling liquid or odors in soil treatment area, around OWTS, or in basement.
- Sewage backups in household drains.
- Presence of bright green, spongy grass over the soil treatment area, even during dry weather.



### Who to call and when?

**Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment (PDPHE):** Contact when a permit for an OWTS repair, remodel, replacement, or new construction is needed. Certified OWTS Inspectors from PDPHE will determine compliance with all pertinent state and county regulations regarding an OWTS.

**OWTS Inspector:** Call to locate an OWTS system, to determine if a system is functioning properly, or when selling a home. Systems should be inspected and pumped every three years. The OWTS Inspector must be certified by the National Association of Wastewater Technicians (NAWT), or an equivalent program approved by PDPHE.

**OWTS Cleaners:** Call every 3-4 years (per Pueblo County OWTS Regulation No. VIII) to clean out the septic tank to prevent sludge from causing household backups or from clogging the STA pipes. Depending on usage, a tank may need to be pumped more often. OWTS Cleaners must have a valid OWTS Cleaner's License from PDPHE.

**Transfer of Title Inspector:** Prior to the sale of a property containing a residence or commercial building/facility that is served by an OWTS, the OWTS must be pumped and then inspected by PDPHE or a NAWT Certified Transfer of Title Inspector. An Acceptance Document must be received from PDPHE prior to the transfer of title for the home.

### Obtain a Permit from PDPHE prior to the following circumstances

- To install, repair, expand, use, or operate all On-site Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS).
- The sale of a property as defined by PDPHE's current OWTS Regulation.
- A remodel of the home that includes the addition of bedrooms.
- A change in the use of the property from residential to commercial.
- Other conditions that PDPHE may deem appropriate.

## Septic System Maintenance Record

Use this log sheet to keep a record of the maintenance and inspections of a sewage treatment system just like an automobile. If there is more than one septic system on the property, be sure to keep a separate record for each system.

Date of Service Month/Day/Year	Contractor	Scheduled Activity	Activities Completed	Comments
Example 11/15/2021	Joe's Plumbing 719-555-1234	System inspection	System inspection	Sludge layer ok, may need pumping next year