Failed Wastewater Systems
...The Dos and Don'ts

Don't ignore the problem! It will not go away and may make a small simple problem into a large and costly one.

Do conserve water until the repair is complete.

Don't attempt to repair a failing system yourself.

Do hire a licensed designer or engineer to evaluate the system and if needed assist in applying for a permit.

Don't bury the problem area under more soil, this will not make the problem go away and may cause additional issues.

Don't redirect the water to a ditch, storm sewer, stream, abandoned well, or any other body of water or hole in the ground. It is illegal and can cause a serious environmental and health hazard.

Do fence off the area where wastewater is surfacing to keep people and animals away from untreated wastewater.

Do place hay bales around the area to redirect water back into the problem area and away from surface water.

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WHO WE ARE

About Us

We are the Drinking Water & Groundwater Protection Division for the State of Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation. We work with landowners, designers, and engineers permitting potable water and wastewater systems, protecting Vermont's land and water for all. Our focus and mission is to protect human health and the environment while encouraging innovation in design. Please contact your local Regional Office for assistance..

Regional Office Contacts

Montpelier: 802-828-5034 Springfield: 802-289-0603 Rutland: 802-786-5900 St Johnsbury: 802-751-0130 Essex: 802-879-5656

Web: www.septic.vt.gov

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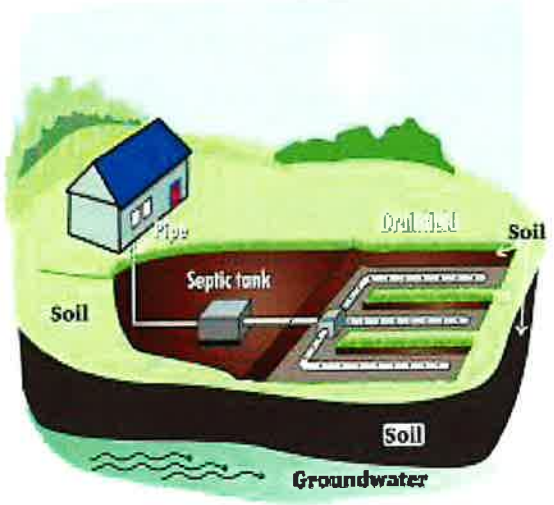
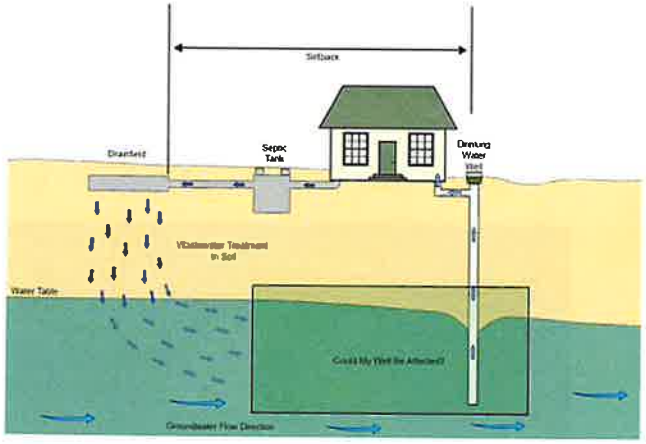
GUIDE TO FAILED WASTEWATER SYSTEMS





So, you think your wastewater system may be failed?

Wastewater systems (often referred to as septic systems) can fail for a wide variety of reasons, not all of them controllable. If you suspect you have a failed system, contact a VT State Licensed Designer or Engineer to examine your system and determine potential fixes, which may be simple. Anything beyond a minor problem will require a permit from the Vermont State Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Program. Failed system permits will specify a date for the new system to be installed.

How to Prevent a Wastewater System from Failing

- ✓ Conserve Water – Utilize low-flow plumbing fixtures and be water aware, particularly in the Spring or after a major weather event.
- ✓ Repair or Replace leaking plumbing fixtures - One sink dripping once every second is adding over 5 gallons to your system every day!
- ✓ Maintain proper landscape on and around your system – wastewater disposal areas (leachfields) should be covered with grass and devoid of trees. Surface water, such as water from downspouts and driveways should be diverted away.
- ✓ Pump your tank regularly – Pumping out solids from a septic tank prevents clogs to the leachfield from forming. Additives have not been shown to be an effective replacement.
- ✓ Limit what goes into the System – don't use it as a trash can or dispose of harmful chemicals.
- ✓ Do not drive or build on any part of your wastewater system!
- ✓ Inspect the wastewater system routinely – check for signs of problems in the system before failure occurs.

Signs of a Failed Wastewater System

- ➢ Wastewater backing up into your toilets, tubs, or sinks.
- ➢ Slow-draining fixtures, especially following a weather event.
- ➢ The smell of sewage, particularly when accompanied by soggy ground or water discharging over the ground or in a nearby ditch, even if the discharge is not constant.
- ➢ A flashing light or beeping alarm in the house or yard indicating a pump is not working or the level in a tank is too high.