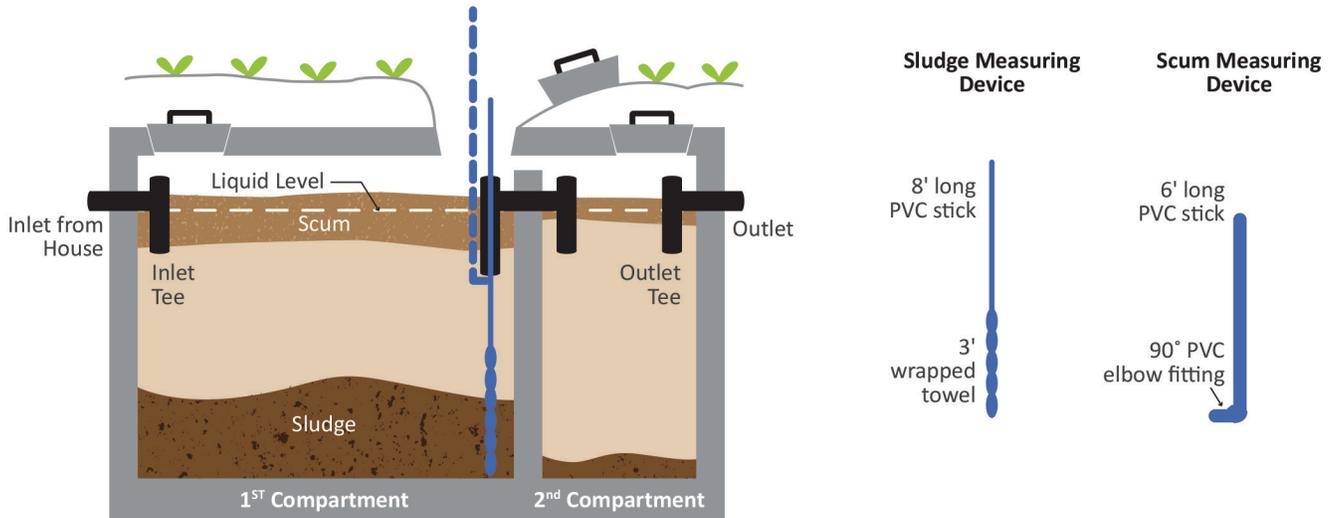


Inspecting Your Septic Tank



Measuring the Scum Level

This procedure is for determining the distance between the bottom of the scum layer and the bottom of the outlet baffle or tee.

1. Establish a convenient reference point, such as a stick laid on the ground across the top of the hole or riser.
2. Using PVC pipe and a 90-degree elbow fitting, create an L-shaped stick by attaching the elbow to a six inch length of pipe to the bottom of a length of pipe at least six feet long.
3. At the access lid, in the first compartment, carefully push the stick through the scum layer to find the bottom of the baffle or tee.
4. Mark the stick at the reference point to indicate the bottom of the baffle or tee.
5. Raise the stick until it's possible to feel or see the horizontal part of the stick contact the bottom of the scum layer.
6. Mark the stick again at the reference point to indicate the bottom of the scum layer.
7. If the two pencil marks are three inches or less apart, the tank needs to be pumped. If the top of the scum is within one inch of the top of the outlet baffle, the tank needs to be pumped.
8. Set the stick aside for later comparison with sludge level stick.

Measuring the Sludge Level

This procedure is for determining the distance from the bottom of the outlet baffle or tee to the top of the sludge layer.

1. Wrap three feet of white rag or old toweling around the bottom of a stick at least eight feet long and fasten it with tape or string.
2. Carefully lower the stick to the bottom of the first compartment. To avoid pushing it through the scum layer, lower the stick behind the outlet baffle or through the outlet tee.
3. Hold the stick in the tank for a few minutes to allow sludge particles to adhere to the towel. Mark the stick at the reference point to indicate the bottom of the tank.
4. Remove the stick carefully and note a distinct dark stain on the towel representing the sludge layer.
5. Lay the stick beside the scum stick. Line up the top pencil marks on both sticks.
6. Measure the distance from the bottom of the scum stick to the top of the dark stain on the sludge stick.
7. If the distance is 12 inches or less, the tank needs to be pumped.

Septic Tank Maintenance

The lack of septic tank maintenance can cause sewage to back up into the house or solids to overflow to the drainfield. Once solids leave through the tank outlet, they can quickly clog a drainfield, to the point where a new one is required. Most septic tanks need to be pumped every 3 to 5 years, depending on the tank size and the amount and type of solids entering the tank. The inspection of the sludge and scum level is the only way to determine when a tank needs to be pumped. This is not necessarily a pleasant task, but can be done relatively easily. Septic tank pumping firms are available to perform this inspection.

Other Important Maintenance Information

1. Special septic tank additives will not reduce the need for regular pumping. These products can even cause solids to carry over to the drainfield, causing early system failure. Some of these compounds have been shown to pollute the groundwater.
2. Materials not easily decomposed, including sanitary napkins, coffee grounds, cooking fats, bones, disposable diapers, and cigarette butts should never be flushed into a septic tank. These items will not degrade in the tank and will increase the need for more frequent tank pumping. They also can clog inlets, outlets, and the drainfield.
3. When pumping, it is not necessary to leave solids in the septic tank to aid in starting the system. However, the septic tank must not be disinfected, washed, or scrubbed.
4. When the septic tank manhole is open, check the condition of the inlet and outlet baffles. Have the septic tank pumper replace them if they are in poor condition or are missing.
5. A record drawing showing the location of your septic tank may be requested by calling 509.324.1546 or emailing asbuiltrequest@srhd.org with the street address or parcel number. If no record exists, probing with a steel rod gently tapped into the ground, starting five feet from where the sanitary sewer leaves the house, should help you find it. Septic tank pumpers are advertised in the yellow pages or online. A list of permitted pumpers is available at srhd.org.
6. Garbage grinders should not be used unless additional capacity is built into the septic tank and drainfield. They use excessive amounts of water. The ground garbage increases the wastewater strength and the need for more frequent pumping of the tank.
7. Equipment is also commercially available to measure scum and sludge levels.
8. Never enter any septic tank. Poisonous gases or the lack of oxygen can be fatal. Any work on the tank should be done from the outside.
9. Keep accurate records of the location of your septic tank as well as dates when the tank has been inspected or pumped.

Preventative Maintenance Record

Date	Work Done / Comments	Vendor	Cost

