

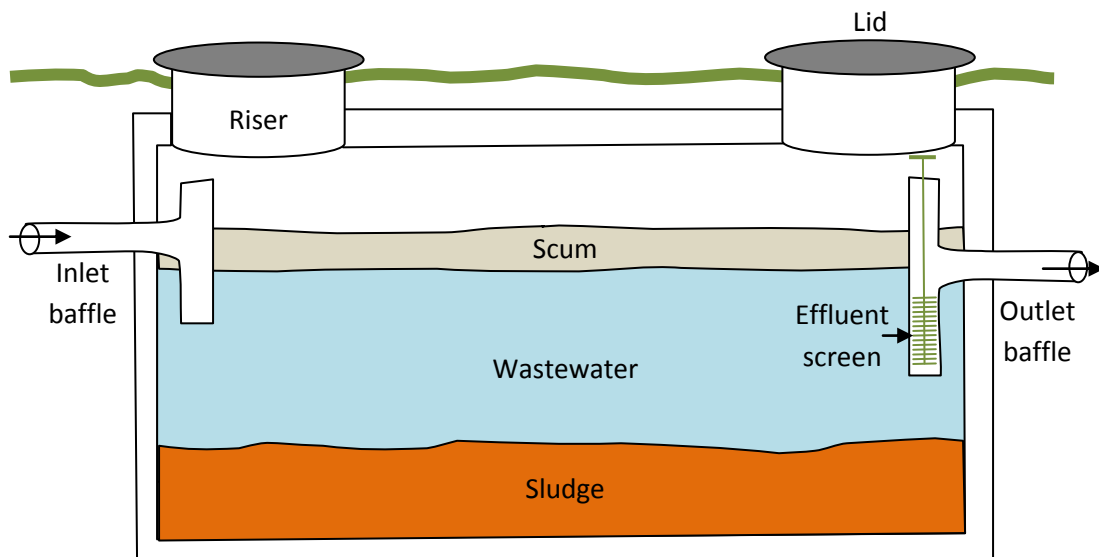
Septic tank

A septic tank is a watertight receptacle that is designed and constructed to receive the discharge of sewage from a building. This tank should be big enough to allow a one day amount of wastewater to be retained for at least 36 hours.



The raw sewage will naturally separate by density in 3 layers in the tank:

1. The heaviest layer, the sludge, will settle on the bottom of the tank;
2. The wastewater is found above the sludge; and
3. The lightest layer, or scum, which contains greases, fats and hair, will float above the wastewater

Only the liquid layer should move to the drainfield.



Septic tanks are built from either concrete or fiberglass. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Plastic Tank	Concrete Tank
	
Light weight, easily maneuverable	Heavy, need special equipment for installation
Less expensive	More expensive
Resistant to cracking	Can crack under extreme circumstances
Less durable	Extremely durable
Possible flotation if groundwater is found at installation site	Less apt to float
Less environmentally friendly (fabrication)	More environmentally friendly (fabrication)

Some factors can affect the septic tank performance, including the following:

- The strength of the wastewater.

If the discharge is a high strength effluent, more time will be needed to settle the solids. A bigger septic tank will be required.

- The daily flow.

Excessive flow will decrease the time spent in the tank. The separation of the different layers won't be complete and abnormal amount of solids will move to the drainfield and possibly clog it.

- Introduction of chemical and pharmaceutical products

These can harm the microorganisms of your septic tank and reduce the performance of your system.

- Introduction of fats, oils and greases (FOG).

If the building discharges a higher amount of FOG (ie restaurant), a grease trap should be installed and/or a bigger septic tank should be considered.

Maintenance

The septic tank accumulates sludge and scum. Too much accumulation will allow solids to go to your drainfield and clog your system. For normal use, First District Health Unit recommends pumping your tank at least every 3 years.

You can also measure the depth of the scum and the sludge layer and then determine if your tank need to be pumped. The procedure is explained [on the First District Health Unit website](#).