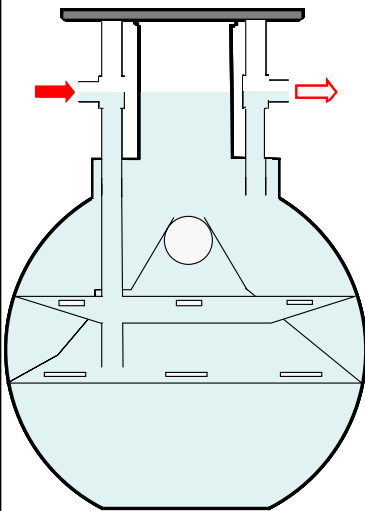


Septic Tank Care

There are a million septic tanks in Britain and, to most of their owners, their working remains a mystery. A properly sized, sited and maintained septic tank system will give trouble free operation for years. But when they go wrong they can create odours, cause damp patches in the garden and even become a health hazard and a pollution threat. This leaflet provides information about your septic tank and simple advice on how to keep it functioning properly.

What is a Septic Tank System?

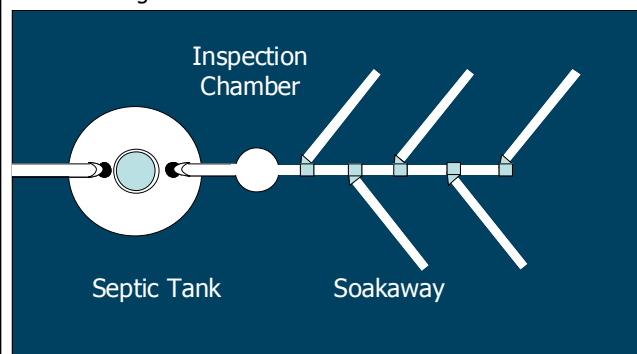
The system has two major parts - the septic tank and a connected soakaway. A septic tank is a large tank buried in the ground which usually contains a number of chambers. Older septic tanks were usually brick-built, newer designs are almost always made from glass reinforced plastic materials. Wastewater flows from the home into the tank which is designed to allow solids to separate out, forming a sludge at the bottom of the tank. It is normal for a scum layer to form on the surface of the septic tank.



The clarified wastewater flows out of the tank into the soakaway. In a septic tank that is operating properly, the effluent flowing to the soakaway should be pale grey in colour and there should be no sign of solids in the flow.

By having your tank desludged regularly, you can prevent the excessive build up of sludge and prevent solids being carried over in the effluent where they may foul the soakaway.

Soakaways are usually land drains laid out in shallow trenches in a herringbone pattern below ground. Sometimes they consist of one or more pits filled with stones to assist drainage. For a soakaway to be effective it is important that it is large enough to handle the anticipated flow from the tank and that it is built in well-drained ground.



Heavy, particularly clay soils frequently give problems. Occasionally soakaways can silt up causing the whole system to back up. They can usually be returned to good service by high pressure water jetting, however if this fails to remedy the situation the only course of action is to renew the soakaway.

It's a living thing!

As the solids separate out as sludge at the bottom of the septic tank, natural bacteria begin to break down the waste materials in the tank into simpler, less harmful waste. Even so, the water flowing out of your septic tank should never be thought of as "clean" and it still has the potential to cause harmful pollution if, for example, it was discharged into a pond or stream. Nevertheless, the bacteria in the tank perform an important function and you need to keep their health in mind when you pour household products down the drain! Bleach and disinfectant should be used sparingly in the home as both can significantly reduce bacterial activity. Paints and solvents – such as white spirit – can also be very harmful if they enter the septic tank. Never clean paintbrushes in the sink.

Household detergents, although generally not toxic to bacteria, can also affect the separation of solids in the tank if used in large quantities over a short period of time. If possible, always wash your laundry with full loads and, rather than doing a number of washes on the same "washday", try to stagger your use of the washing machine throughout the week.

Fat or grease can also spell problems for septic tanks as it does not separate into the sludge and can cause blockages. Soakaways can be badly affected by grease carried over from the septic tank. Hotels, restaurants and public houses which are served by a septic tank should always install grease traps to prevent fouling of the septic tank and soakaway.

How big should my tank be?

In general, the bigger your septic tank, the better. This is because the residence time of wastewater increases with the size of the tank so separation of solids from water is improved, as is the degradation of waste by bacteria in the tank.

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A further benefit of a large tank is that detergents, bleach, disinfectants etc, are more quickly and thoroughly diluted.

The Environment Agency recommends that the minimum capacity of a septic tank serving one household should be related to family size. A tank of capacity 2,800 litres (about 600 gallons) is sufficient for a family of 3. A family of six would require a minimum of 3,500 litres (about 750 gallons). If your septic tank is shared between several houses the tank would need to be correspondingly larger. Ten people would need a tank of at least 4,500 litres (about 1,000 gallons).

One common problem leading to the poor performance of septic tanks arises when rainwater drainage (from roof guttering and driveways) is connected into the septic tank. In wet weather this can rapidly overload the tank, disturbing the sludge and leading to soakaway problems. ALWAYS make sure that your home's rainwater drains are separate from the foul drainage system and that they have separate piping and soakaways.


How often do I need to have my septic tank emptied?

The general advice from the Environment Agency recommends that septic tanks should be emptied, or "de-sludged", once a year by an operator registered for the carriage of the waste sludge by the Environment Agency. In practice the frequency will depend on the number of people living in the property. We will be pleased to advise on the optimum emptying schedule for your septic tank system.

Who should I get to empty my tank?

You should always use a licensed contractor. It is illegal to empty a tank in any other way. Unblock Cumbria is licensed by the Environmental Agency to remove and transport septic tank wastes. We always dispose of these wastes at licensed sewerage treatment works and are happy to provide all documentation to support this. Some types of septic tank can be damaged if emptied by untrained operators.



 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION UNDER THE CONTROL OF POLLUTION (AMENDMENT) ACT 1989

Regulation Authority		
Name:	NORTH WEST REGION - Penrith	
Address:	Ghyll Mount Gillan Way, Penrith 40 Business Park Penrith, Cumbria, Post Code: CA11 9BP	
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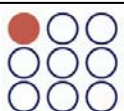
The following information is hereby certified by the above-mentioned authority to be information which at the date of this certificate is entered in the register which they maintain under regulation 3 of the Controlled Waste (Registration of Carriers and Seizure of Vehicles) Regulations 1991:-

Name(s) of registered carrier:	Unblock Cumbria Ltd	
Registration number:	CMA/192823	
Business name (if any):	Unblock Cumbria Ltd	
Address of registered carrier's principal place of business:	Clay Flatts Industrial Estate Workington Cumbria CA14 2TQ	
Tel:	Telex:	Fax:
01900 870140		01900 872128
Date of registration:	13/02/2004	
Date of expiry of registration*:	12/02/2007	
Date on which last amendment (if any) was made to the carrier's entry in the register:	13/02/2004	

Signature of authorised officer of the regulation authority: *Mary J Carmie* Date: 12-1-2004
[See over]

Do's and Don'ts

- ◆ Do empty your septic tank regularly. We can advise on the optimum schedule for this work based on the size of your household and the design of your tank.
- ◆ Do use a certified contractor who will transport and dispose of the sludge in a proper manner.
- ◆ Do ask your contractor to provide a free annual inspection of the system.
- ◆ Don't allow large amounts of bleach or disinfectants to enter your septic tank, try to use such products sparingly.
- ◆ Don't allow cross-connections between the foul water and rainwater collecting systems for your house as this will overload your septic tank.
- ◆ Don't allow large amounts of grease and fat to enter the septic tank system. This will lead to blockages and may permanently damage the soakaway. Restaurant, hotel and public house kitchens should have grease traps fitted to their kitchen waste systems.
- ◆ Don't wash paint brushes in the sink or allow waste solvents, such as white spirit, or waste oils to enter your drains and septic tank.
- ◆ Don't enter an empty septic tank for any reason, the atmosphere is hazardous to health. If you believe an inspection is necessary consult Unblock Cumbria in the first instance.



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