

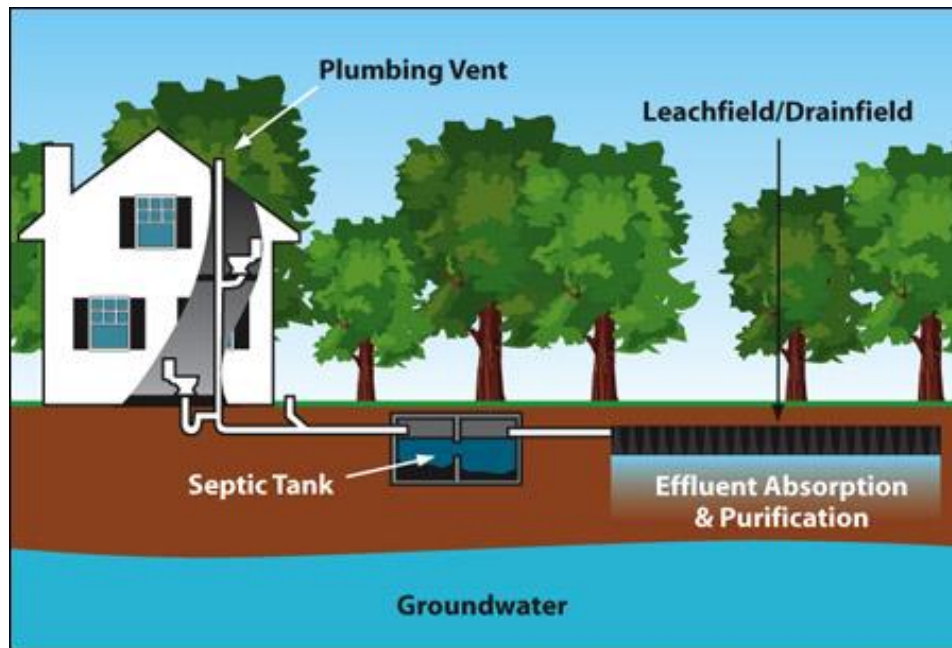


TOWN OF LINCOLN
MIDDLESEX COUNTY MASSACHUSETTS
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WATER DEPARTMENT
Phone: 781-259-2669
BOARD OF HEALTH
Phone: 781-259-2614

Comprehensive Guide to Caring for Your Home Septic System

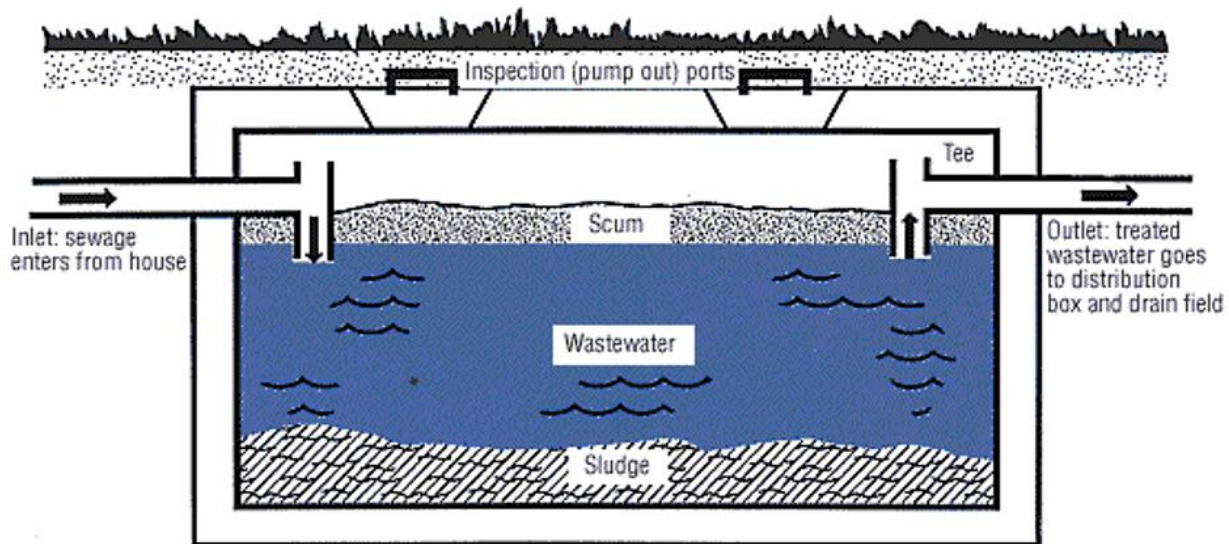
Lincoln does not have a municipal sewer system, so homeowners are responsible for installing and maintaining a properly working septic system. Improper care can ruin your septic system and replacing it will be very expensive (as of 2021, replacement will cost \$10,000 - \$50,000). We hope you will find this document helpful.



This document is sponsored by the Board of Health (BOH) and the Water Department (WD) to reduce the possibility that a septic system will fail. An improperly working septic system can cause a public health issue by polluting ground and surface water and potentially contaminating the Lincoln Public Water supply. The Board of Health is legally responsible for approval and permitting of septic systems¹.

¹ Per the Massachusetts septic system regulations per 310 CMR 15.00, often called "Title 5"

Important Facts About Septic Systems



- Septic systems do not get rid of the solid part of the waste, they only cleanse the liquid. The solid material must be pumped from the septic tank periodically and disposed elsewhere.
- Septic systems are living biological systems that depend on bacteria to process and cleanse the waste. You do not want to poison your friendly bacteria (more on that later).
- The final step in the process occurs in the leaching field. The liquid passes slowly through the soil and is cleansed by filtration and bacterial processes before it reaches the ground water. You do not want to clog up the pores in the leaching field so the water no longer moves through the soil (more on that later, also).
- Reducing water use improves septic system operation.

How often should I pump my septic tank?

- Pumping every 3-5 years is usually sufficient; after several pumpings, your pumping contractor can advise on frequency for your system. We recommend against garbage disposals. If you have and use one, pump every year.²
- Always hire pumpers and contractors licensed by the Lincoln BOH (a list is available from the BOH office.) Be sure to retain a paid receipt from the pumper detailing the work (gallons pumped, the date, the charges, and any other pertinent results). The pumper also sends a copy of this report to the Lincoln Board of Health.

² Local Lincoln ordinances require that septic systems serving garbage disposals have leaching fields 150% more than required by state regulation (Title 5). Avoiding the extra capacity requires a deed restriction that current and future owners may not connect a garbage disposal.

What happens if I don't pump my septic tank often enough?

- An overly full septic tank can cause septage to back up into the house or destroy the leaching field, with a substantial cost to you in either case. Septage backup can require moving out of your house while the septage spill is remediated. Septage overflow into the leaching field clogs its pores potentially requiring its replacement.
- Since a failed leaching field no longer cleans the effluent sufficiently, the leachate may contaminate streams, ponds, and aquifers in the area, including the public drinking water if your property is in the protected zones. To find out if your property is in a protected zone, you can see maps showing protected areas at the Conservation Office at Town Offices or on line at the Water Department website:

http://www.lincolntown.org/DocumentCenter/View/947/2021-ZoneIIIWatershed_TowerRdWell?bidId=
<http://www.lincolntown.org/DocumentCenter/View/948/2021-FlintsPondSurfaceWaterProtectionMap?bidId=>

What should I NOT put down the drain or into the toilet?

- Any paper other than toilet paper. No baby wipes even if it says “flushable.” No paper towels or even facial tissue, which are designed to stay strong when wet. Even thick puffy toilet paper can cause problems. See the “Toilet Paper Test” →
- Oil-based paint or paint solvents, gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, etc. Save them for proper disposal on the Town’s Hazardous Waste Days:
<http://www.lincolntown.org/DocumentCenter/View/27625/Hazardous-Waste-Municipal-Calendar>
- Latex paint: try to minimize latex paint brush-cleaning wash water. Dry excess paint in the can or on newspapers and discard with the regular trash.
- Joint compound from dry wall projects: it has insoluble elements.
- Grease and oil from cooking, which combine with soap to make an insoluble sludge. Instead pour them into a container filled with absorbent paper and discard with the trash.
- Strong chemicals, petroleum products, or household disinfectants that may kill the good bacteria or get into the ground water. Choose household cleaners that are labeled biodegradable, phosphate-free, and environmentally friendly. Cleaners with citrus, vegetable, pine oil or seed-based components listed as the primary active ingredients are good choices.
- General trash: cigarette butts, dental floss, condoms, women’s sanitary products, disposable diapers, cat litter. If it doesn’t dissolve in water, don’t flush it.



- Commercial septic tank additives: not necessary and may harm your system. If you insist on using one, MassDEP maintains a list of safe additives:
<https://www.mass.gov/guides/septic-system-additives-allowed-for-use-under-title-5>
- Excess water: Putting a lot of water into the system over a short period reduces the time the effluent stays in the septic tank, reducing the effectiveness of the treatment, and can flood the leaching field.

How can I reduce water use?

- Spread out laundry activities throughout the week; don't do 3 or 4 loads in a row.
- Install High Efficiency toilets and clothes washers. Rebates are available for upgrades:
<http://www.lincolntown.org/398/Restrictions-Conservation-Water-Use>
- Install faucet aerators and high efficiency shower heads.
- Check your water meter for the dripping faucet icon that indicates you have a water leak. A leak such as a silent toilet leak can degrade the effectiveness of your septic system (and cost you several thousand dollars on your water bill). You can find directions for reading your water meter at the Water Department website:
<http://www.lincolntown.org/DocumentCenter/View/58938/How-to-Read-Your-E-Coder-Water-Meter>

How can I protect my septic system structure?

- Learn the location of your septic system and leaching field. Keep a sketch of it handy for service visits. (If you don't know its location, contact the Lincoln Board of Health. They retain drawings of all certified systems in Lincoln.)
- Don't make or allow repairs to your septic system without obtaining the required health department permit. Use only approved contractors when needed (List available from BOH).
- Never drive over or park on your leaching field or septic tank. They could collapse under the extra weight.
- Grow & maintain low-growing native plants (not trees or shrubs) above the septic system leaching field to control excess runoff from rain events. Plant trees the appropriate distance from your drainfield to keep roots from growing into your septic system (a septic service professional can advise you of the proper distance, depending on your septic tank and landscape).
- Keep the outlets from roof drains, sump pumps, and other rainwater drainage systems away from your leaching field area.

What if I think my septic system is not working properly?

- Contact a BOH-licensed septic service company for repairs and also notify the Lincoln Board of Health at 781-259-2614 or carrolle@lincolntown.org.

More information

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/caring-for-your-septic-system>