



FACTSHEET 2: SEPTIC TANK AND SOIL ABSORPTION TRENCH SYSTEMS

If you live in an unsewered area, you need to choose an appropriate method for the treatment and disposal of household wastewater to protect public health and preserve the environment. A traditional septic tank and absorption trench system is a way of achieving effective onsite wastewater management on residential properties. For specific information go to <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/water/onsite-wastewater>

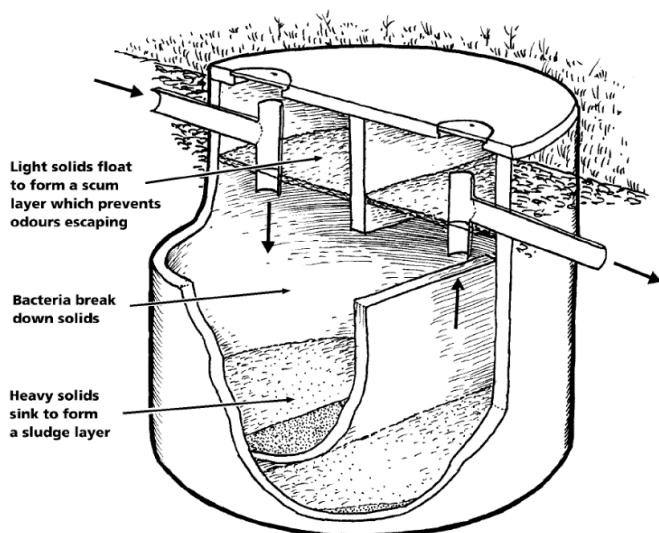
What is a septic tank and absorption trench system?

In a conventional septic tank and absorption trench system, all household wastewater flows into a septic tank where it is digested by a host of different bacteria.

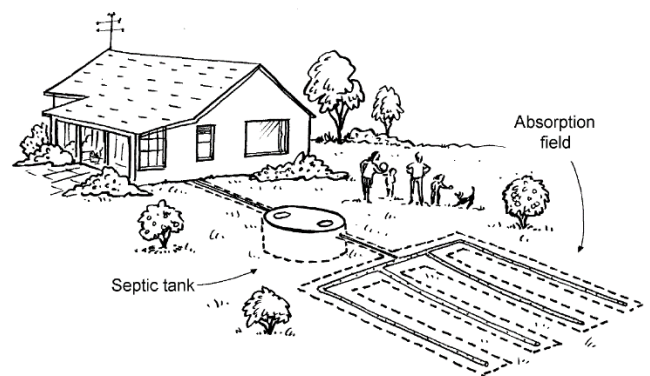
When this tank fills, the clarified effluent will be gravity fed or pumped out to the buried absorption trenches.

How does a septic tank and absorption trench system work?

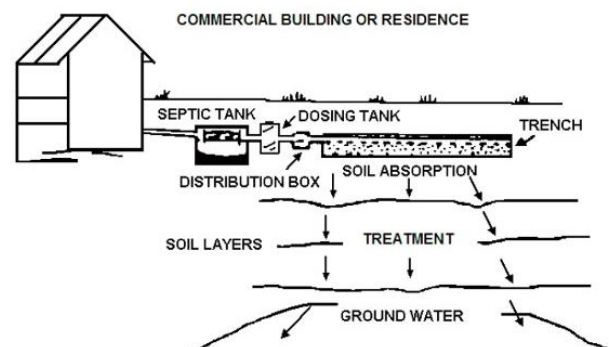
- Household wastewater first flows into a primary septic tank where solids settle to the bottom of the tank to form a sludge layer, and greases and fats float to the surface to form a scum layer.



The septic tank 'ecosystem'



- Clarified effluent then flows or is pumped to the absorption trench for treatment and disposal.
- The effluent is typically distributed the length of the trench via pipes, and filters through the gravel and sand to the underlying soil.
- This filtering process allows the removal of pathogens, toxins and other pollutants.
- Nutrients left in the wastewater are then taken up by vegetation (normally grass) planted across the surface of the trench.

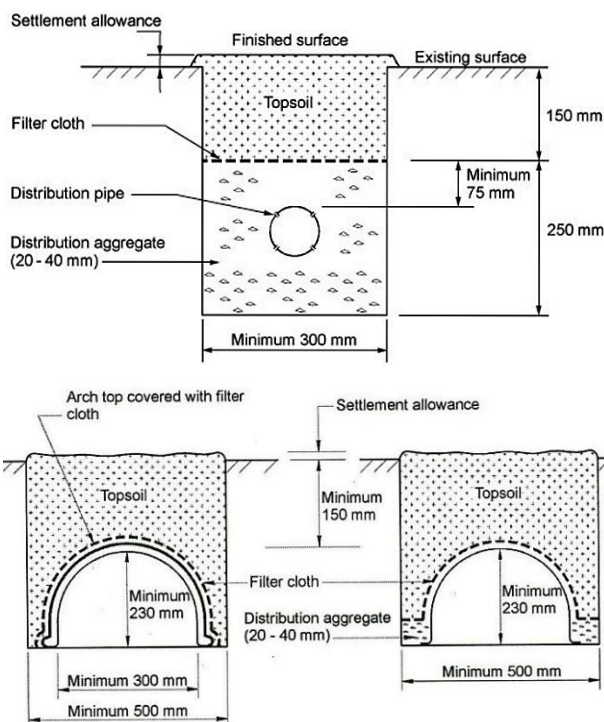


How to maintain a septic tank and absorption trench system

Regular maintenance is essential in prolonging the life of your septic tank and absorption trench, as well as avoiding any costly repairs.

The following tips will help in ensuring that your system continues to operate efficiently:

- Do not plant trees or shrubs on top of the septic tank or absorption trench.
- Do not park vehicles or build structures on top of the absorption trench or allow stock to graze over the area.
- Ensure stormwater is diverted away from the absorption trench.
- Ensure that your septic tank is regularly de-sludged (every three to five years).
- Maintain grass cover on the surface of the trench to allow uptake of nutrients.
- Minimise the use of detergents, bleaches and disinfectants around the home.
- Ensure that you regularly inspect your septic system and absorption trench area.



Septic tank and absorption trench system problems

The following warning signs will indicate that your system is not working well:

- Soggy grass in the area above or near the absorption trench during dry periods.
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing.
- Pooling of wastewater in/around trenches.
- Sluggish flow when flushing the toilet.
- Backup of sewage in house plumbing.
- Should you notice any of these signs, contact a licensed plumber immediately.

Please note: *Septic tank and absorption trench systems have the potential to contaminate groundwater and are not recommended in sensitive locations or in areas with heavy clay or shallow soils.*



For more information call (03) 55680555 or go to www.moyne.vic.gov.au

Information Guide adapted from existing EHPA, Dept. of Local Government NSW & Tweed Shire Council resources. Moyne Shire Council acknowledges these sources.