What are the basic septic system maintenance requirements?

Your town may have specific requirements. At the very least, we recommend a scheduled inspection every 1-3 years. Pump and repair the septic system as needed, based on the inspection. The system should be pumped if the depth of sludge and scum layer is 50% or more of the liquid level in the tank.

Should I use septic system additives?

No. There is no scientific proof indicating septic system additives improve septic system function. In fact, they may eventually harm your system. Save your money for inspections and pumping.

I’ve had my septic system for 20 years and never had to do anything to it. It must be okay, right?

With a properly functioning septic system, up to 80% of the solids can be broken down into gases and liquids. However, every system needs pumping eventually. If your system has never been pumped then the solids are going somewhere, including direct discharge to a surface water body, the groundwater, or into the drainfield. Pumping frequency depends on number of people, household water use and the size of the tank.

Are there certain areas within the town where enhanced treatment septic systems should be used rather than conventional systems?

Yes, in sensitive resource areas such as the coastal salt ponds and around drinking water supplies. Enhanced treatment septic systems are necessary to remove pathogens and nitrate-nitrogen from your household wastewater. Conventional systems do not provide this necessary treatment even when working properly. Also, enhanced treatment systems should be used at existing home sites requiring repairs or replacement where the site cannot accommodate a conventional system.

For More Information: Technical Assistance, training programs and information. URI Cooperative Extension’s On-Site Wastewater Training Center George Loomis, Program Director, (401) 874-4558, gloomis@uri.edu David Dow, Program Manager, (401) 874-5950, dbdow@uri.edu Website: www.uri.edu/ce/wq
Are there basic retrofits that I can have done to my conventional septic system to enhance treatment and maintenance?

Yes, you can have an effluent filter and access risers installed to help enhance primary treatment (solids settling and breakdown) in the tank. Both risers and effluent filters should be included in every new tank installation and can be retrofitted within most existing tanks.

What can I plant near and around my septic system?

Grass cover is best over the system. Within a 10' perimeter around the drainfield, there should be no woody plants or plants with invasive roots, which can damage or clog the drainfield.