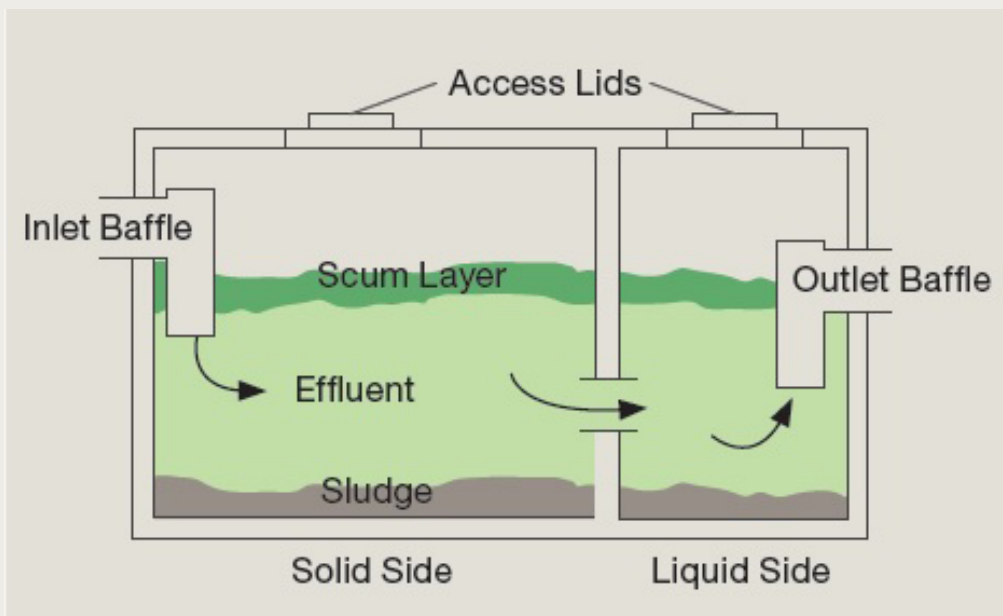


# »» *how a basic septic tank works*

## OSSM Factsheet 2

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**The major function of a septic tank is to separate solids, grease and oils out of the wastewater before it enters the drainage beds/trenches.**

### »» *Septic tank function*

When wastewater passes through the septic tank, heavier solids sink to the bottom and undergo bacterial digestion. This reduces the quantity of solids and also changes its composition to sludge, which builds up in the bottom of the tank. Materials such as grease and oil float to the surface in the tank to form a crust over the liquid, called scum. The remaining liquid, called effluent, flows from the tank into the drainage beds/trenches to soak into the surrounding soil where it may undergo further natural treatment processes.

When a septic tank system is correctly installed and maintained, it should work effectively for many years.

If the septic tank accumulates too much sludge and scum, the effective volume of the tank is reduced which in turn reduces the time for separation to take place.

This means not all the solids, grease and oils will separate and will pass out of the septic tank and into the drainage beds/trenches. This will clog the soil surrounding the drainage beds/trenches and should be avoided. To prevent this from happening, it is necessary to have the septic tank desludged (pumped out) regularly e.g. 5 yearly intervals. Desludging requires that a licensed liquid waste contractor be engaged to open the septic tank and pump out the contents.

A healthy septic tank is a living ecosystem where the right bugs (bacteria) thrive in the right proportions to digest human waste and prepare the liquid (effluent) for treatment.

### »» *Health caution*

Septic tanks do not kill pathogenic bacteria, viruses or parasites. Septic tank effluent must be treated with extreme caution and contact with people, food, clothing and pets must be prevented! Do wash your hands!!

»» **If you have any questions or concerns please contact:**

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