

## Septic System Troubleshooting Guide for Homeowners

Problem	Risks	Potential Causes	Potential Remedies
Sewage backs up into house and/or plumbing fixtures don't drain or are sluggish	Human contact with sewage is a serious public health risk. Many waterborne diseases exist in household sewage. <b>AVOID CONTACT.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excess water entering system</li> <li>• Improper plumbing</li> <li>• Blockage in plumbing</li> <li>• Improper operation</li> <li>• Pump failure</li> <li>• Improper system design</li> <li>• Roots clogging pipes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix leaks</li> <li>• Install water-saving fixtures</li> <li>• Stop using garbage disposal</li> <li>• Clean septic tank and check pumps</li> <li>• Replace broken or cracked pipes and remove roots</li> <li>• Seal pipe connections</li> <li>• Avoid willow trees near system</li> </ul>
Sewage surfacing in yard	Human contact with sewage is a serious public health risk. Many water-borne diseases exist in household sewage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excess water use</li> <li>• System blockages</li> <li>• Improper system elevations</li> <li>• Undersized soil treatment system</li> <li>• Pump failure or improper operation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix leaks</li> <li>• Install water-saving fixtures</li> <li>• Clean septic tank and check pumps</li> <li>• Consult professionals</li> <li>• Fence off area until problem is fixed</li> </ul>
Sewage odors — indoors	Toxic gases can cause discomfort and illness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sewage surfacing in yard</li> <li>• Improper plumbing</li> <li>• Sewage backup in house</li> <li>• Unsealed ejector sump pump</li> <li>• Roof vent pipe frozen closed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repair plumbing</li> <li>• Clean septic tank and check pumps</li> <li>• Replace water in drain traps</li> </ul>
Sewage odors — outdoors	Major nuisance, but no serious health risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source other than owner's system</li> <li>• Sewage surfacing in yard</li> <li>• Inspection pipe caps damaged or removed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean tank and check pumps</li> <li>• Replace damaged caps</li> <li>• Repair or replace drainfield</li> </ul>
Contaminated drinking or surface waters	The above public health risks are magnified by possible ingestion of contaminated water. Drinking contaminated water can cause health problems such as dys -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System too close to well, water table, or fractured bedrock</li> <li>• Cesspool or drywell in use</li> <li>• Sewage discharges to surface or groundwater</li> <li>• Improper well construction</li> <li>• Broken water supply pipe</li> <li>• Source other than</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replace your well and/or septic system</li> <li>• Contact a local unit of government to investigate other potential sources</li> </ul>

entery, hepatitis, and, for infants, methemoglobinemia. homeowner's system

- Broken sewage lines

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Lift station alarm activated

Tank effluent may back up into the house.

- Pump failed
- Fuse breaker tripped
- Pump unplugged
- Controls malfunctioning

- Check breaker and plugs
- Check controls and pump
- Make sure professional replaces pump with proper size unit

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Distribution pipes and/or soil treatment system freezes in winter

The system may be inoperable.

- Improper construction
- Check valve in lift station not working
- Foot or vehicle traffic over piping
- Low flow rate
- Lack of use
- Undersized pump

- Check construction
- Examine check valve and/or replace it
- Keep people and vehicles off area
- Increase water use
- Have someone use water in house if you are away
- Increase frequency of pump cycling
- Operate septic tank as a holding tank
- Pump system in fall and use carefully over winter months
- Don't use antifreeze

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