


**Reasons for Failure:** You can sense a failed system not only when a foul odor is emitted, but also when partially treated wastewater flows up to the ground surface. But by the time you see or smell a problem, the damage might already be done. If the amount of wastewater entering your system is more than it can handle, the wastewater backs up into your house or yard and creates a health problem. By limiting your water use, you can reduce the amount of wastewater your system treats. When you have your system inspected and pumped as needed, you reduce the chance of failure.

**Maintenance Reporting:** A report must be submitted to the Dept. of Land Management within 30 days of any maintenance or service to your POWTS. If a required report is not received, the county may send a reminder that maintenance is due, along with a maintenance report form. You have not satisfied code requirements until the county receives the maintenance report.

**POWTS Maintenance Program:** In 1980, Pierce County started participating the WI Fund. As a condition of that program, the County adopted a POWTS maintenance program. WI Admin. Code mandates that all counties include every POWTS, regardless of age, into their maintenance program. By 2017, Pierce County needs a complete inventory of all POWTS in the county. By 2019, all owners of POWTS will receive maintenance reminders to maintain their POWTS.

 **Tank Cover Locks:** For safety reasons, manholes or tank access openings that extend above the ground surface must be kept covered and locked. It is the property owners responsibility to be sure the covers remain in place and locked or secured to prevent unauthorized access. Pumpers must report missing locks, and if missing, the County will require replacement.

## SEPTIC TIPS

- ✓ **Keep it Protected—Get it Inspected!** Have your septic tank inspected / pumped by a licensed professional every 3 years.
- ✓ **Don't Strain your Drain!** Use water efficiently to avoid overtaxing your system. Fix household leaks. Only run dishwasher and clothes washer for full loads.
- ✓ **Think at the Sink!** Don't pour fat, grease, or harmful chemicals, like paints or solvents, down your sink. They can clog and harm your system.
- ✓ **Don't Overload the Commode!** Don't flush non-biodegradable items, such as dental floss, diapers, coffee grounds, or feminine hygiene products.
- ✓ **Shield your Field!** Care for your drainfield. Plant shallow-rooted plants, do not drive / park on it, and reduce roof / surface water drainage near the drainfield.

**Know your part, be SepticSmart! [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)**

This brochure is intended to give a summary of Pierce County's POWTS maintenance requirements.

> Pierce County Code Ch. 191 can be found at: [www.co.pierce.wi.us](http://www.co.pierce.wi.us) on left side of screen find "Pierce Co. Code," then scroll down to "Ch. 191-Sewage Disposal."

> Ch. SPS 383 can be found at: <http://www.dsps.wi.gov/Programs/Industry-Services/Industry-Services-Programs/private-onsite-water-powts>



### PIERCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Department of Land Management & Records  
Pierce County Courthouse, PO Box 647, Ellsworth, WI 54011  
Phone: 715-273-6746 or 715-273-6747 [www.co.pierce.wi.us](http://www.co.pierce.wi.us)

When's the last time  
you thought about your  
septic system?



Your septic system is part of your home. Don't wait until you have issues. Protect your investment. Avoid costly repairs or replacement. Keep the septic system working properly and help extend its life by following these maintenance tips.

**septicmart**  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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# Maintaining your Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (POWTS)

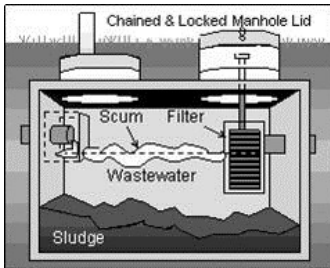


## Why maintain your POWTS?

The U.S. EPA says 1 in 5 U.S. homes have a septic system. You may have one. Regular maintenance is a bargain compared to the cost of repairing or replacing a malfunctioning system. No one wants to inherit an unusable system, so having an operating POWTS helps protect your property value. Household wastewater contains bacteria, viruses, and high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. If the POWTS is maintained well, it will remove most of these pollutants and keep you and your neighbors healthy and protect the environment.

Inspection can only be completed by a WI Licensed Master Plumber or Master Plumber-Restricted Service, Journeyman Plumber or Journeyman Plumber-Restricted Service, POWTS Inspector or Maintainer, or Certified Septage Servicing Operator (pumper).

**Septic Tanks:** At-grade, conventional, and mound systems are the most common septic systems and they all have septic tanks. Required maintenance of these POWTS include having the system visually inspected every 3 years and having the tank(s) pumped if sludge and scum occupy more than 1/3 of the tank volume.



Tanks can only be pumped by a WI DNR Certified Septage Servicing Operator (pumper). There is more to just pumping and dumping. They are responsible for adding stabilizers to kill bacteria and viruses and neutralize the waste. They are responsible for spreading waste in approved amounts on approved sites.

Most POWTS installed after Fall 2000 have effluent filters that need periodic cleaning and maintenance as specified in the POWTS management plan. A management plan pamphlet can be found at [www.co.pierce.wi.us](http://www.co.pierce.wi.us) select 'County Departments,' select 'Land Management,' scroll down and select 'Sanitary.' Or the plans designed specifically for your POWTS system can be obtained by contacting our office.

Proper maintenance will keep the system working properly and help extend its life. Inspections will help identify potential problems with your system. Pumping the tank(s), inspecting the baffles, and cleaning the filter will help keep unwanted materials from flowing into and clogging the drainfield.

**Holding Tanks:** Holding tanks collect and hold all wastewater from your home. Since these systems do not include any treatment or disposal component, all sewage must be pumped and hauled away for proper disposal.

Holding tanks are equipped with an alarm to warn you when the tank is nearly full. Maintenance of the tanks involve having your pumper empty the tanks each time they fill. It is illegal to empty holding tanks yourself or let wastewater, like "gray water" (from sinks, laundry, etc.) onto or into the ground.

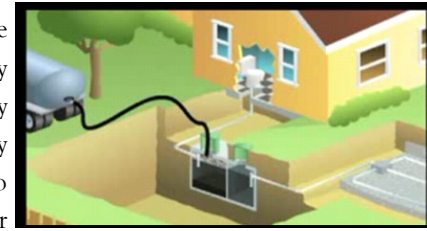
Owners of a holding tank system are required to have a servicing contract with a WI Licensed Septage Servicing Operator (pumper). Whenever there is a change in property owner or pumper, a new contract must be submitted to the Dept. of Land Management.

## How to care for your POWTS:

> Have a WI Licensed Professional pump / inspect regularly. Depending on tank size, pumping may be needed every 1 to 3 years. Pierce County sends out maintenance notifications.

> There is no accepted test to prove septic tank additives work or don't work. Some additives are harmful. If you use a product, be sure it has Dept. of Safety & Prof. Services approval.

> Average water use in a single-family home is 75 gal/day per person. A leaky toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water per day. Repair leaky toilets, faucets, and use high-efficiency fixtures. Use water efficiently to avoid overloading the system.



> Spread out your water usage. Wash 1–2 loads of laundry/day verses all in 1 day. Take short showers rather than baths. Turn off the faucet while shaving or brushing teeth.

>Toilets are not trash cans! Do not flush anything besides human waste and toilet paper.

>Think at the sink! Your septic system has living bacteria that breakdown waste. Pouring harsh chemicals down the drain can kill the organisms and harm your POWTS.

> Plant shallow rooted plants over and near your septic system. Keep most trees 20 feet from the drainfield and water-loving trees 50 feet from the drainfield. Tree or shrub roots might clog or damage the drainfield.

> Don't drive or park vehicles on your septic system. This compacts soil, damages pipes, tanks, or other components.

>Divert surface water drainage away from the system. Do not connect footing drains or other "clear water" to the system. Wastewater from laundry, sinks and showers is not clear water and must discharge to the system.

>Maintain all setback distances when adding new or improving structures on your property. A list of setbacks can be obtained from the Dept. of Land Management.



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