

## CLIENT SERVICES - SEWAGE, CEDAR BLUFF, ALABAMA

The Town of Cedar Bluff does not have a traditional sewer system whereby both solids and liquids are piped away from a residence. The current "system" incorporates a combination of two septic tanks. The primary tank is used to retain the solids while the secondary tank is used to capture the liquids. A "pump" located in the secondary tank is used to pump the liquids to the town's treatment facility.

The following is a very general illustration as to how the "modified" sewage system works in conjunction with Cedar Bluff's sewage operation.

### Septic Tank #1

Household wastewater and solids enter the first septic tank. Overtime, solids settle in the bottom of the tank while the scum floats to the top. Under normal conditions, the settled solids are anaerobically digested reducing the volume of solids. When Tank #1 reaches about 80% of its capacity, liquids will flow (by gravity) to a second septic tank. Tank #1 and Tank #2 are connected by a pipe.

### Septic Tank #2

A sewage pump is installed in Tank #2. The pump rests on the bottom of the tank floor. Two floats are associated with the pump's operation. When the level of the liquids in Tank #2 reaches a predetermined level the lower level float activates a switch that starts the pump. Once activated the liquids are pumped out of the second tank into the town's sewage system. If the lower level float malfunctions, liquids will continue to accumulate until the fluids reach the upper level float. When the upper float is activated an electrical signal is sent to an alarm above ground. The alarm is generally located somewhere in the general area of the septic tanks. When the alarm is activated the pump has malfunctioned and the system will require immediate attention.

Some alarms have a red light on the side of the electrical box, others have audible alarms, and many have both. Once the alarm is activated the tank is not completely full. Under normal use you may have a couple of days in which you can have the pump repaired or replaced. Failing to service the pump will allow the additional accumulation of liquids and in-turn water will leave the tank and escape into the ground.

### About Septic Tanks (General Information)

A septic tank (in this case Tank #1) is the key component of the septic system in Cedar Bluff. For all practical purposes it is a small scale sewage treatment system common in areas with no connection to main sewage pipes provided by private corporations or local governments. In North America approximately 25% of the population relies on septic tanks; this can include suburbs and small towns as well as rural areas.

How often the septic tank has to be emptied depends on the volume of the tank relative to the input of solids, the amount of indigestible solids and the ambient temperature (as anaerobic digestion occurs more efficiently at higher temperatures). The required frequency varies greatly depending on jurisdiction, usage, and system characteristics. Some systems require pumping every few years or sooner, while

others may be able to go 10-20 years between pumpings. Contrary to what many believe, there is no "rule of thumb" for how often tanks should be emptied.

A properly designed and normally operating septic system is odor free and, besides periodic inspection and pumping of the septic tank, should last for decades with no maintenance.

A well designed and maintained concrete, fiberglass or plastic tank should last about 50 years.

As a service to my clients I will provide you with the names of experienced licensed contractors that can assist you with any questions about Cedar Bluff's waste disposal system.

Cathy Griffeth

