

What Could Be Hiding Underground?

You could have some very old technology working for you. In the past, steel tanks, cinderblock tanks or poured-in-place concrete tanks were used. Septic system technology is constantly changing and improving. Today, septic tanks are either pre-fabricated concrete or plastic.

Since the mid-1970s, septic tanks are required to have two compartments. Old tanks may only have one compartment.

Today's pipes used in leaching beds are plastic, but in the past clay tiles, asbestos pipes and non-corrode pipes were used. Today's spacing for leaching bed pipes is 1.6 metres (5.25 feet), but you may find only 0.9 metre (3 feet) spacing in older systems.

If you find these older features, it doesn't mean your system isn't functioning properly, but it certainly indicates its age and that it may not be working to today's standards.

Septic Systems And Your Health

There are many contaminants in wastewater that can affect your health and the environment. They include bacteria, viruses, parasites and nitrate. If contaminants reach your drinking water supply, they can cause diseases or other health or environmental problems.

A properly functioning septic system will remove most contaminants to acceptable levels. However, treated wastewater that percolates through the soil may still contain contaminants that can enter the groundwater table. To reduce the risk to nearby ground or surface water supplies, the location of your septic system is critical.

There are legislated minimum separation distances required between your septic system and your home and well, neighbouring homes and wells and nearby bodies of water. Respecting these distances and planning your lot accordingly will lead to a healthier, longer-lasting system.

To learn more about the basics of rural wells, pick up a Private Water Systems Information Package or a copy of the Best Management Practices book *Water Wells* available free from your local health unit.

