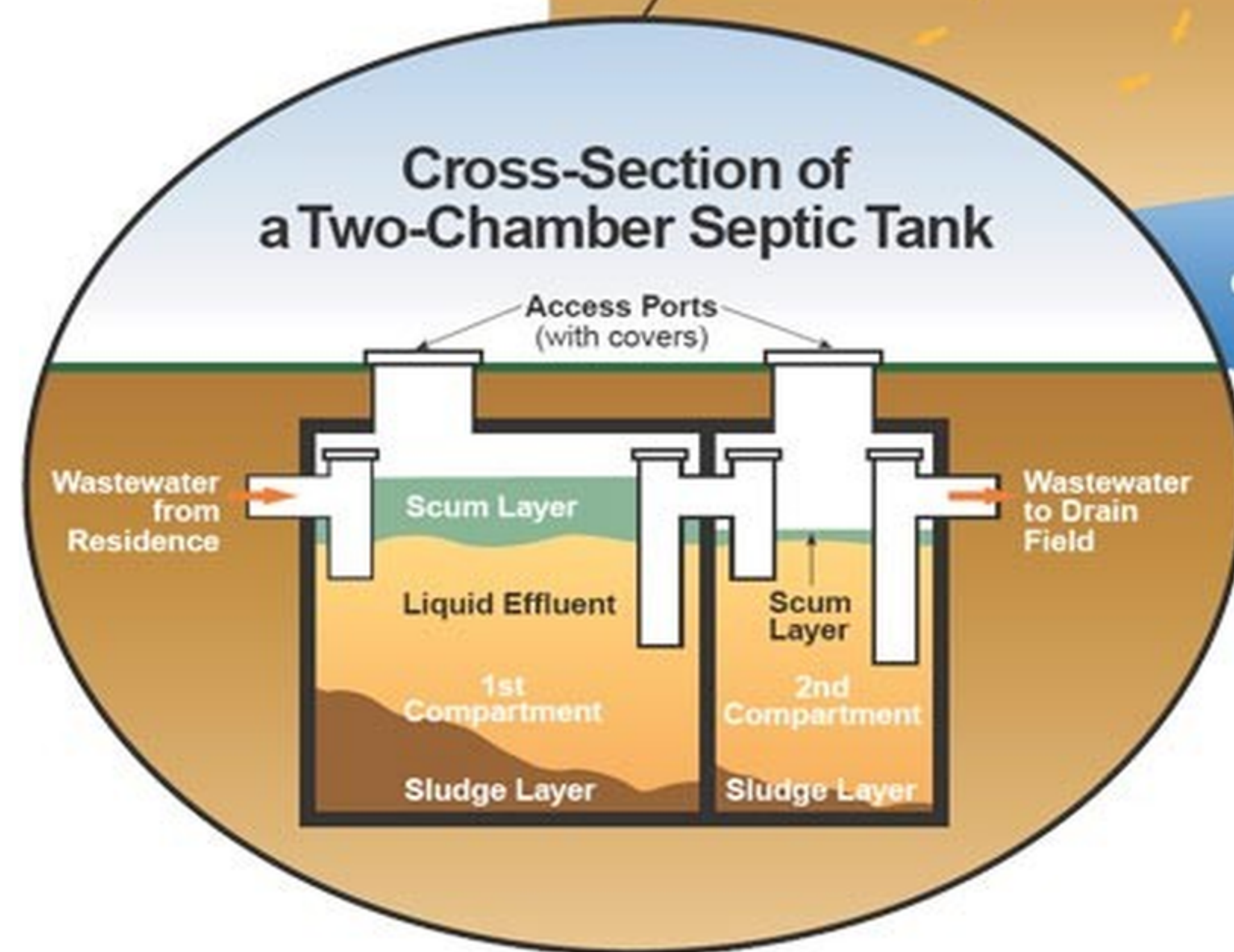
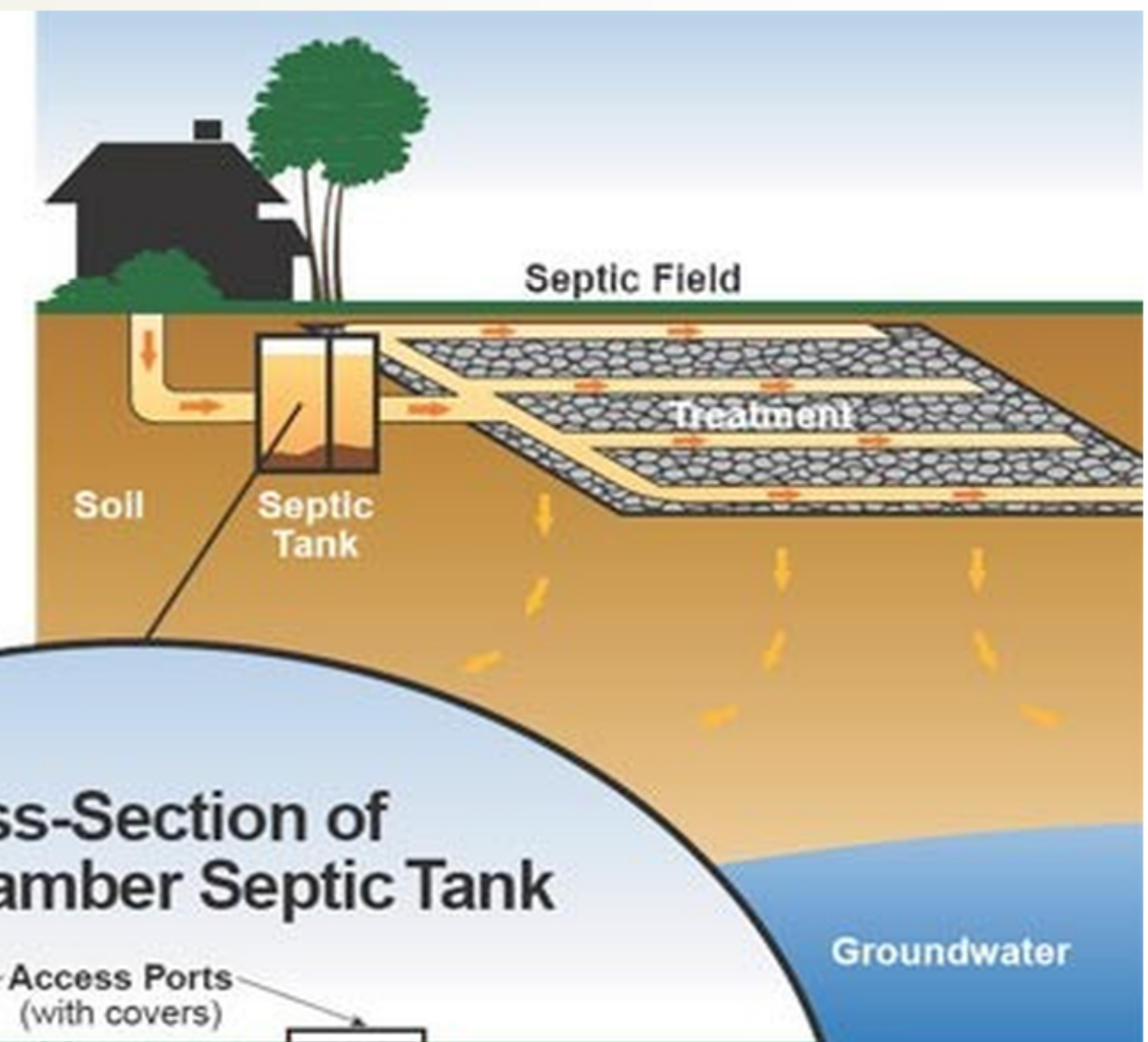




Your Septic System



Protecting Your Investment and the Environment

Single-family homes that depend upon on-septic systems to treat household sewage have to be maintained. A septic system is privately owned, and by law you are responsible for its safe operation, maintenance and repair. The traditional septic system that is used across Ontario has three main components:

1. Septic tank (or other treatment unit),
2. distribution system,
3. and leaching bed.

The “conventional” leaching bed design relies on perforated pipes laid in stone-filled trenches 0.5 metres wide with a 0.9 metre depth in unsaturated soil. The surrounding soil provides a suitable filter to cleanse the septic effluent.

The second most common design is the “raised bed.” This option involves importing appropriate soil onto the site to create a leaching bed which is high enough above the water table or bedrock to provide sufficient filtering for the effluent.

With proper and regular maintenance, traditional septic system designs can perform very well in a variety of soil types and site situations.

Inspecting the Septic System

The Ontario Building Code (OBC) regulates design, construction, operation and maintenance of on-site septic systems for most single family homes; the Ontario Ministry of the Environment regulates larger systems, and those where waste water is treated off site, such as communal systems.

You should have the septic system inspected by a certified on-site system professional (such as a certified installer or engineer) prior to purchasing the home. Call your local municipal office, for a list of qualified professionals.

The inspection should include: a discussion with the homeowner, a review of the system permit, a tank inspection, a leaching bed inspection and a house inspection.

Life Expectancy of Septic System

A septic system should last anywhere from 20 – 25 years, or even longer, if it is properly installed and maintained with regular pump-outs every three to five years.

However, investigators currently estimate that 30 per cent of the estimated one million household septic systems in Ontario are failing to adequately protect the environment.



Your Septic System

Problem Identification Symptoms of a Failed Septic System

- ▶ drains slow down
- ▶ toilets back up
- ▶ sewage smell
- ▶ grass over system is unusually green or spongy
- ▶ bacteria or nitrate contamination showing up in drinking water tests
- ▶ surface ponding of effluent

Consequences of a Failed Septic System

- ▶ backing up into the home and/or breaking out and pooling on the ground surface
- ▶ contamination of surface water and ground water supplies with nitrates,

Where to Go for Approvals

Phone: (519) 631-9587

The Ontario Building Code (OBC) regulates design, construction, operation and maintenance of on-site septic systems for most single-family homes. In most areas, the local municipality's Building Department examines plans, issues permits, and does inspections for systems regulated under the OBC.

- ▶ City Hall 545 Talbot St.—Environmental Services Building Department

The Municipal Building Department will be able to redirect inquiries. Proper approvals under the OBC must be obtained by the homeowner before installing any of the suggestions for improving system performance.

Safe Operation of Your Septic System

Here are some things you can do to responsibly operate and maintain your septic system:

- ▶ Know the location of your tank and bed and have the tank contents pumped out when necessary (generally every 3 to 5 years).
- ▶ Avoid putting food, compost or grease down the drain.
- ▶ Conserve water and try to spread water use over the course of the week – including laundry.
- ▶ Avoid excessive use of anti-bacterial soaps, bleaches and harsh cleaning products.
- ▶ Protect your sewage system – avoid driving over it and do not construct anything (e.g. pools, driveways and sheds) on or near any part of the tank or bed.
- ▶ Avoid putting paints, solvents, pesticides and other toxic chemicals in your system; use recycling or hazardous waste collection programs for these substances.
- ▶ Keep trees and shrubs away from the leaching bed.
- ▶ A properly installed and maintained septic system should avoid contamination of nearby wells. A private well should be tested for bacteria at least 3 times per year.

Ask to See the License

Anyone in the business of installing, repairing, emptying, cleaning or servicing septic systems must be licensed by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Licensed installers must have qualified personnel supervising all projects.

Pumpers are licensed in Ontario by the Ministry of the Environment.

