- The liquid flows into the under ground distribution system where the soil is used to filter the pollutants from the wastewater. For this part of the system to function properly, it must be constructed carefully on suitable soil. The soil also needs time to filter out those harmful materials from the wastewater. "Suitable soils" do not include coarse sand (which permit wastewater to pass through too fast, or "pure clay" which accepts only small amounts of wastewater). State and local regulations that determine what can constitute suitable soil have been developed after careful consideration of many factors that affect a soil's ability to adequately treat domestic wastewater.

- Occasionally the septic tank must be cleaned out and the sludge disposed of at an approved facility. Often publicly owned treatment works accept septage for treatment in the main wastewater treatment plant.

- It is important that homeowners take good care of their septic tanks. In densely populated areas, problems may develop due to the accumulation of nitrates from septic systems in groundwater. **Nitrate** is oxidized oxygen, which can interfere with the blood's ability to carry oxygen, particularly in infants. Nitrate concentrations in excess of 45 parts per million have been reported to cause "blue baby syndrome" an illness in which an infant's coloring takes on a bluish cast. The illness is rare and easily reversible once diagnosed, but it is not fully known what health effects result from long range exposure to low levels of nitrates. If the septic system is not functioning properly, it can also release disease-causing microorganisms. The principle signs of septic system problems are easy to detect - effluent rising to the ground or drains and toilets that operate sluggishly or not at all. Septic system problems can be minimized by understanding the needs of your system and observing several precautions.

- Toxic and hazardous chemicals should never be disposed of through your septic system, as these can disrupt its functioning. Such chemicals include paints, varnishes, pesticides, solvents and drain openers.

- Inert or non-biodegradable materials should also not be disposed of through your septic system. Examples are cat box litter, disposal diapers, coffee grounds, sanitary napkins and paper towels. These items quickly fill your septic tank, decreases its efficiency and will require more pumping of your tank.

- Large quantities of cooking grease and fats should not be allowed into the septic system.

- The performance of your septic system will be improved if you cut down on water use so that a smaller volume of wastewater passes through the system.

- Subsurface disposal areas will not work well if there is too much water in the soil. Water drained from basement floors, footings or roves should be directed away from the disposal area of the septic system.