A household sewage treatment system will serve a home satisfactorily only if it is properly located, designed, constructed and maintained. The purpose of this leaflet is to explain how your system works and how it should be operated and maintained.

System Components

A typical household sewage treatment system consists of a house sewer, septic tank, distribution box and absorption fields or seepage pits.

House Sewer – The pipeline connects the house to the septic tank.

Septic Tank – The septic tank provides needed treatment to household wastes. When sewage enters the septic tank, the heavy solids, fats and greases partially decomposed and rise to the surface and form a layer of scum. Solids that have settled at the bottom are attacked by bacteria and form a sludge.

Distribution Box – The box serves to distribute the flow from the septic tank evenly to the absorption fields or seepage pits.

Absorption Field – This is a system of narrow trenches partially filled with a bed of washed gravel or crushed stone into which perforated pipe is placed. The discharge from the septic tank is distributed through the pipes into the trenches and the surrounding soil. The absorption field must be properly sized and constructed to assure satisfactory operation and a long life.

Seepage Pit – This is a covered pit with perforated sides through which the discharge from the septic tank infiltrates into the surrounding soil. It is generally installed in sandy or gravel-type soils. Like the absorption field, the seepage pit must also be property sized and constructed. While seepage pits may require less land area to install, they should be used only where absorption fields are not suitable and well water supplies are not threatened.

Operation & Maintenance

In many neighborhoods in Westchester County, individual household sewage treatment systems are used for the disposal of household wastes. As a homeowner using a septic system, you should be aware of the following:

- The contents of your septic tank should be pumped every two to three years or when the total depth of sludge and scum exceeds one-third of the liquid depth of the tank. If the tank is not cleaned periodically, the solids are carried into the absorption field, where rapid clogging occur. This leads to premature failure and eventually the absorption fields must be replaced.

- Pumping your septic tank is less expensive than replacing your absorption field.

- Detergents, kitchen wastes, laundry wastes and household chemicals in normal amounts do not affect the proper operation of household sewage treatment systems. However, excessive quantities can be harmful.

- Garbage grinders substantially increase the accumulation of solids in the septic tank, as well as the solids entering the absorption fields and pits. Their disadvantages outweigh the convenience they provide and are not recommended for households with their own sewage treatment systems. If used, the septic tank size should be increased.

- All of your laundry waste must be connected to the septic system. Excessive laundry can be damaging to the septic system.

- Do not dispose of cigarette butts, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, plastics, trash, etc., in your household sewage system. These items do not readily decompose.

- Septic tank additives are not recommended. Additives are not necessary for the proper operation of household systems and may cause the sludge and scum in the septic tank to be discharged into the absorption field, resulting in premature failure.

- Backwash from water softeners may be discharged to the septic tank and absorption system if discharged at low daily volumes.