

## FAQs

### **What is a cesspool?**

A cesspool is a deep pit that the raw sewage flows into. The sewage then drains or “percolates” into the surrounding soil. All solids and liquids flow into this cesspool.

Many of Kauai’s cesspools are discharging into the groundwater. The state of Hawaii is pushing for homeowners to upgrade their cesspools to septic systems to help the environment and prevent contamination of the groundwater and surrounding rivers and ocean.

### **What is a septic tank?**

A septic tank is an enclosed container that all the raw wastewater flows into. The main function of the tank is to breakdown solids from the wastewater to then provide “treated effluent” to flow into the drainfield or seepage pit.

### **What is a drainfield?**

A drainfield is an underground bed consisting of a pipe and gravel system or chambers. This is also referred to as an absorption bed. The effluent is then further treated as it passes through minerals and nutrients found in the surrounding soil.

### **What is a seepage pit?**

Like the cesspool, it is a deep pit that the effluent flows into from the septic tank. However, there is no raw wastewater flowing in to this pit. These pits are lined with concrete rings, and the effluent infiltrates the pit side wall for final treatment and disposal through the minerals and nutrients in the surrounding soil.

### **What does your proposal include?**

We design and work with clients to design a best-case scenario septic system. We perform the percolation test, drafting and design of septic system, submittal of engineered plans to the DOH, coordinate construction with installation contractors after the septic permit has been approved, and inspect the installed septic system for as built report and approval.

### **Are there any tax credits available for upgrading my cesspool?**

Yes. Through ACT 120, a homeowner may qualify for a tax credit of up to \$10,000. To qualify, you must have a qualified cesspool that has been upgraded to a septic system or aerobic treatment unit, that is located within 500 feet of a shoreline, perennial stream, wetland, or within a Source Water Assessment Program Area (based on a two-year time travel from a cesspool to a public drinking water source.) Under Act 133, large capacity cesspools that serve multiple dwellings or twenty or more persons a day also qualify if upgraded. Please follow this link to the state’s website. We’d be happy to assist you in applying for this credit.

### **How do I maintain my septic system?**

Minimum of once a year, your septic tank should be inspected. You can hire an authorized serviceman to perform this maintenance check or you can do it yourself. Please note that the gases can be dangerous and that you should never inspect a tank alone and never enter the tank. The tank shall be pumped once the levels of sludge and scum levels become high. Pumping of the septic tank shall be completed by the authorized serviceman.

### **How do I prevent my septic tank from failing?**

Prevent flushing any objects that are not biodegradable or cause blockage. Stay away from flushing grease and oils and using harsh chemicals. Do not drive or park over the septic tank. Do not plant large trees or any plants that have a large and deep root system. Water conservation, yearly maintenance checks and pumping the system when needed will help prevent failure.

### **How do I know if my system is failing?**

Signs of failure range from sewer backing up into the house, water ponding, settling soil, caving soil, foul smells or odors, and excessive pumping.

### **What can I do if my current system is failing?**

If your cesspool is failing, we recommend upgrading to a DOH approved septic system as soon as possible.

If your septic system is failing, we recommend inspecting and finding what is causing the failure. A remedial plan should then take place.

### **Am I allowed to drive and park over my system?**

In some cases, the septic system is designed to be H-20 traffic rated to allow being driven and parked on. Most of the time, the septic systems installed are not rated for traffic flow. Parking and driving on the system could crush the system and can cause the surrounding soil to compact, preventing natural treatment of the effluent. It would be best to keep vehicles from driving and parking on the system.

### **Am I allowed to plant anything over my system?**

We recommend only having grass above the septic system. Maintain 10' minimum from any trees and bushes to keep any root systems from growing into the system causing blockage and ending in failure.

### **How do I know what type of system I have?**

Most residences on Kauai are serviced by cesspools. New septic systems require an "as built" drawing and report to be submitted for final approval by the DOH. If you don't have any records, you can submit a request form at the Department of Health. If they do not have any records, you can contract a serviceman who can help locate the system on your property. It is recommended to inspect the system once located to ensure it is in good working order. We will be able to prepare final documentation if needed.