

Sanitary Facilities

The following tables show the degree and kind of soil limitations that affect septic tank absorption fields, sewage lagoons, sanitary landfills, and daily cover for landfill. The ratings are both verbal and numerical. Rating class terms indicate the extent to which the soils are limited by all of the soil features that affect these uses. Not limited indicates that the soil has features that are very favorable for the specified use. Good performance and very low maintenance can be expected. Slightly limited indicates that the soil has features that are favorable for the specified use. The limitations are minor and can be easily overcome. Good performance and low maintenance can be expected. Somewhat limited indicates that the soil has features that are moderately favorable for the specified use. The limitations can be overcome or minimized by special planning, design, or installation. Fair performance and moderate maintenance can be expected. Very limited indicates that the soil has one or more features that are unfavorable for the specified use. The limitations generally cannot be overcome without major soil reclamation, special design, or expensive installation procedures. Poor performance and high maintenance can be expected.

Numerical ratings in the tables indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.00 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the use (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

Septic tank absorption fields are areas in which effluent from a septic tank is distributed into the soil through subsurface tiles or perforated pipe. Only that part of the soil between depths of 24 and 60 inches is evaluated. The ratings are based on the soil properties that affect absorption of the effluent, construction and maintenance of the system, and public health. Permeability, depth to a water table, ponding, depth to bedrock or a cemented pan, and flooding affect absorption of the effluent. Stones and boulders, ice, and bedrock or a cemented pan interfere with installation. Subsidence interferes with installation and maintenance. Excessive slope may cause lateral seepage and surfacing of the effluent in downslope areas.

Some soils are underlain by loose sand and gravel or fractured bedrock at a depth of less than 4 feet below the distribution lines. In these soils the absorption field may not adequately filter the effluent, particularly when the system is new. As a result, the ground water may become contaminated.

Sewage lagoons are shallow ponds constructed to hold sewage while aerobic bacteria decompose the solid and liquid wastes. Lagoons should have a nearly level floor surrounded by cut slopes or embankments of compacted soil. Nearly impervious soil material for the lagoon floor and sides is required to minimize seepage and contamination of ground water. Considered in the ratings are slope, permeability, depth to a water table, ponding, depth to bedrock or a cemented pan, flooding, large stones, and content of organic matter.

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Soil permeability is a critical property affecting the suitability for sewage lagoons. Most porous soils eventually become sealed when they are used as sites for sewage lagoons. Until sealing occurs, however, the hazard of pollution is severe. Soils that have a permeability rate of more than 2 inches per hour are too porous for the proper functioning of sewage lagoons. In these soils, seepage of the effluent can result in contamination of the ground water. Ground-water contamination is also a hazard if fractured bedrock is within a depth of 40 inches, if the water table is high enough to raise the level of sewage in the lagoon, or if floodwater overtops the lagoon.

A high content of organic matter is detrimental to proper functioning of the lagoon because it inhibits aerobic activity. Slope, bedrock, and cemented pans can cause construction problems, and large stones can hinder compaction of the lagoon floor. If the lagoon is to be uniformly deep throughout, the slope must be gentle enough and the soil material must be thick enough over bedrock or a cemented pan to make land smoothing practical.

A trench sanitary landfill is an area where solid waste is placed in successive layers in an excavated trench. The waste is spread, compacted, and covered daily with a thin layer of soil excavated at the site. When the trench is full, a final cover of soil material at least 2 feet thick is placed over the landfill. The ratings in the table are based on the soil properties that affect the risk of pollution, the ease of excavation, trafficability, and revegetation. These properties include permeability, depth to bedrock or a cemented pan, depth to a water table, ponding, slope, flooding, texture, stones and boulders, highly organic layers, soil reaction, and content of salts and sodium. Unless otherwise stated, the ratings apply only to that part of the soil within a depth of about 6 feet. For deeper trenches, onsite investigation may be needed.

Hard, nonrippable bedrock, creviced bedrock, or highly permeable strata in or directly below the proposed trench bottom can affect the ease of excavation and the hazard of ground-water pollution. Slope affects construction of the trenches and the movement of surface water around the landfill. It also affects the construction and performance of roads in areas of the landfill.

Soil texture and consistence affect the ease with which the trench is dug and the ease with which the soil can be used as daily or final cover. They determine the workability of the soil when dry and when wet. Soils that are plastic and sticky when wet are difficult to excavate, grade, or compact and are difficult to place as a uniformly thick cover over a layer of refuse.

The soil material used as the final cover for a trench landfill should be suitable for plants. It should not have excess sodium or salts and should not be too acid. The surface layer generally has the best workability, the highest content of organic matter, and the best potential for plants. Material from the surface layer should be stockpiled for use as the final cover.