

## RV HOLDING TANKS AND HOW TO USE THEM PROPERLY

RVing can take you to some beautiful locations and help you create wonderful memories. But not every part of RVing is pretty. Maintaining and emptying your septic system on a regular basis is an unglamorous — but necessary — part of any RV adventure. And without proper maintenance and care of this system, things can get pretty ugly.

Whether you're a new RV owner or you are a veteran, it's important to know how to care for your RV tanks the right way. . This guide will help you get started and show you the basics.

What does an RV septic system look like?

Recreational vehicles typically come with three tanks, located on the underside of the RV, to keep things running smoothly.

### **1. Fresh Water Tank**

There are usually three tanks on an RV: fresh water, grey and black.

As the name suggests, this tank is for freshwater. This is the water that comes out of your taps.

### **2. Grey Water Tank**

The grey tank holds the dirty water from your RV shower and the kitchen sink. Some used campers and vintage RVs may not have this tank.

### **3. Black Water Tank**

This is the one that tends to scare new RVers. The black tank holds waste water from the toilet. If your RV does not have a gray tank, all dirty water is dispensed into this tank.

When not maintained properly, any one of these tanks can cause problems.

How often should the tanks on my RV be emptied or does it matter?

There's no real rule about when to empty your tanks — it all depends on how much you use them.

How often you need to empty your tanks depends on how you use them and how many people are using them.

You should wait until your tanks are about two-thirds full before emptying them. It creates a much better "flow" when dumping, making the process much easier and effective.

Some RVs come with systems to show you exactly how full your tanks are. This is a great way to gauge when to dump, but after a few years, these sensors don't always work well. Even new ones may give an incorrect reading because of paper or other waste sticking to the sensor making it read "full" when it's not. It's important to stay cognizant of how much water waste you are really accumulating.

### **How do I empty my RV tanks?**

The holding tanks should be clearly marked on your RV.

Before your first waste water dump, make sure you have a sewer hose and some gloves to protect your hands.

Next, be sure to identify the valves on the outside of your RV. These will be clearly marked "grey" and "black".

Hook your sewer hose up to the valve on the RV. Take the other end and secure it to the sewer you are using. Ensure it is fastened on both ends before pulling the valves! Again....DOUBLE CHECK .....trust me the alternative is no fun!

Start with the black tank. Remember, the toilet waste water dumps directly into this tank. Never dump this water anywhere except designated dump stations. Dump stations are always clearly marked.

To empty, pull the valve and let the tank drain. Close the valve when you can no longer hear any liquid coming through the hose. Ensure the valve is closed completely. This is very important. Do not leave the black tank valve open all the time!!!!. It will cause all the liquid to flow out, leaving the solids no way of draining.

Always make sure the valve on your black tank is closed completely after dumping. When you've ensured the valve is shut, pull the grey tank valve. Again, close when done.

Some people leave the gray tank valve open outside of the RV and let it drain continuously. This is ok if your unit has a specified black tank flush valve you can add water to the black tank to flush it out clean. It is a good idea to shut the grey tank valve a 12 or 24 hours before tank flush day, so you have some grey water built up to flush out the sewer hose after you dump the black tank. Some people keep everything closed. Flushing the gray tank after the black tank helps flush any solids stuck in your sewer hose. If you keep this valve open, you will not have that extra water to flush out the sewer hose after the black tank.

For easy clean up, go slowly when detaching the sewer hose. Many RVers use a bucket or tub to contain the hose when not in use.

Once you get the hang of emptying the tanks on your recreational vehicle, the process can go quickly and smoothly. But there's more to using your tanks properly than emptying them — maintenance is just as important and will help prevent trouble down the line.

*A regular flushing along with cleaning and sanitizing your tanks will keep the system up and running fairly free of problems.*

### **Fresh Water Tank**

The fresh water tank just holds fresh drinkable water to use in the RV when you have no fresh water connection.

When hooked up to water or filling the tank, use only a potable water hose. These are easy to spot because of their white or blue color . Potable water spigots will often be painted blue as well .

If the fresh water tank begins to smell, it may be contaminated. Use household bleach or a commercially available fresh water tank sanitizer to clean the tank

Pour ¼ cup of bleach for every 15 gallons of water in your tank.

Run the water until you smell bleach.

Continue to run until all the bleached water is out.

Let your tank sit for 24 hours.

Refill your tank and run the water until the bleach smell is gone.

Use as normal

### **Grey Water Tank**

Again, this is where runoff water from your sink or RV shower is held. In large travel trailers and fifth wheels, there may be two gray tanks.

It's important to note that the drain into this tank is small. Take every precaution to ensure food particles do not go down the drain. Even something as small as a pea may cause a clog.

### **Black Water Tank**

You should only ever empty your tanks at a designated dumping station.

There are a few good rules of thumb for minimizing trouble with the dreaded black tank:

Use single-ply toilet paper or RV specific paper - Scotts is our favorite brand.

Flush regularly, always adding water to the toilet bowl before flushing.

Sanitize your tank after dumping. You can find special chemicals for this in the RV section of any big box store.

Clean this tank often by putting a garden hose down the toilet. You can buy special "wands" to do this and it's a good idea to do this several times a year. Most modern RVs come with a black tank flush valve that accomplishes the same thing. Regular flushing and maintenance will prevent system breakdowns

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