

Septic System Inspections

- **Inspect and Maintain Your Septic System for a Healthy Environment and Home**
- **Homeowners Play a Role in the Inspection Process**
- **Know How Your Septic System Works... and How to Keep It Working!**
- **Know What to Expect at the Inspection**

Why Have Your Septic System Inspected?

- To save money! If your system is not properly planned, designed, installed, operated and maintained, it will be more likely to need costly repairs and your property and home values could be affected.
- To make sure your system is functioning properly.
- To monitor the use of the system in order to extend its life.
- To catch and troubleshoot problems in their early stages before they become serious and expensive to correct.
- To protect the health of your family and neighbors from contamination of drinking water sources. This is especially important if you and your neighbors rely on well water.
- To protect life in local rivers, lakes, and coastal waters and prevent the need for costly rehabilitation of waterbodies and wildlife.
- To fulfill legal or lending institution requirements for property transfers.
- To comply with environmental and health regulations.



When Should Septic Systems Be Inspected?

- It is recommended that most systems be inspected annually and pumped every 3-5 years. However, individual system needs vary depending on the size and age of the system, the number of people it serves, and the system's past performance.
- Systems should be inspected at the time of a property transfer.
- Inspection may also be necessary during changes or repairs to your home.

Who Inspects Septic Systems?

- Licensed engineers, certified home inspectors, health officials, sanitarians, and some independent septic system pumpers and haulers may be qualified to inspect your system. Contact your local or county health department to obtain a list of professionals. Compare estimates, check references, and hire someone with the appropriate experience.
- While the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) does not have specific regulations for testing septic systems nor for licensing or certification of individuals performing such inspections, guidance on inspections is provided in the NJDEP's "Technical Guidelines for Inspections of Onsite Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Systems". These guidelines can be found at www.state.nj.us/dep/dwq/pdf/inspection_guidance.pdf

What If Your System Has a Problem?

- If the inspector notes potential problems, additional tests may be recommended.
- Many problems may be simple to repair by actions such as pumping, repositioning, replacing parts, or fixing leaks or cracks.
- If a more serious problem occurs, contact your local health department for information and advice.
- Be aware of the most practical and cost-effective solutions.
- Your local health department will issue you a permit for repair and you may have a time limit to repair your system.
- If you or your neighbors use wells, have them checked for contaminants.



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How Can You Be Involved in the Inspection Process?

- Gather information about your system. Locate the drawings or reports from previous inspection or maintenance visits. If you keep a maintenance record, have that available as well.
- Be present to answer the inspector's questions and to be sure that everything is done thoroughly and correctly.
- During the visit follow the inspector to observe, ask questions, and learn about your system and its care.

What to Expect at the Time of Your Inspection?

- The specific actions taken during an inspection may vary, depending on the type and condition of your system and the available historical information.
- The goal of the inspection is to assess the condition of the system at a particular point in time.
- The inspector may check your property for visible signs of trouble, such as leakage above the surface or bright green grass on the drainfield.
- The inspector will check inside the house as well. The inspector will note the location of plumbing fixtures to determine the path of wastewater flow. To check for wastewater backup, the inspector may flush toilets and run faucets.
- The inspector will need to locate your system; having the "as-built" drawing on hand may be helpful.
- The inspector will note the size of the tank, the construction material, and the odor and appearance of the wastewater inside. The inside of the tank will be checked to make sure that parts are in proper operating condition.
- The inspector will measure the layers of sludge and scum to ensure that proper separation and treatment of materials is occurring.
- The distribution box where the treated water is transferred to the drainfield will be inspected to be sure that distribution is even.
- Systems that have electronic devices will be checked for proper alarm and control functions.
- The drainfield will be located and examined for certain types of vegetative cover, such as trees and shrubs. The area surrounding the drainfield will be probed to test the soil for any clogging.
- The inspector may use dyes or tracers in toilets or drains to determine if there are leaks in the system.

