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# What to Expect When You're Inspected

## *fact sheet*

### Overview

Inspection and pumping are two vital parts of septic system ownership and maintenance. Even though your septic system appears to be working fine, you may be unaware that it is allowing nutrients or bacteria to reach ground or surface water supplies. Regular inspection is the only way to ensure proper operation and prevent water supply contamination from septic system effluent.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends having your tank inspected every one to three years and pumped as necessary, or at least every three to five years.

The components of septic system inspections can vary based on what the homeowner is willing to pay for, but generally include:

1. Locating the system.
2. Uncovering access holes to the septic tank.
3. Checking for signs of plumbing backup.
4. Measuring sludge and scum levels.
5. Identifying any leaks.
6. Examining mechanical components.
7. Pumping the tank, if necessary.

During the inspection, the certified contractor should measure the levels of sludge and scum. If the bottom of the scum layer is found to be within six inches of the bottom of the outlet, or the top of the sludge is within 12 inches of the outlet, the contractor will probably recommend your tank be pumped. The contractor should also provide you with a report indicating if any repairs were performed and if the tank is in good condition.

Thorough certified inspectors will take the time to check all components of the septic system, starting with running water into the septic tank from household plumbing, physically looking into the tank to ensure its watertightness and measuring the levels of scum and sludge. Certified inspectors may also locate and examine the distribution box to ensure each drainfield line is receiving the same amount of effluent and draining properly.

The certified contractor should also inspect the drainfield for sogginess or wastewater at the surface, which can indicate a clogged drainfield, improper drainage, excessive water use, or a leak in the system.

### **Missouri Bit**

All septic system inspections, repairs, or replacements must be performed by a certified professional in Missouri. A certification program was developed in response to concerns of negative health impacts resulting from failing septic systems and lack of regulation. septic system professionals must complete the Department of Health and Senior Services basic registered installers training course to be state certified. To find a certified professional in your area, visit the Department of Health and Senior Services website at [http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Onsite/onsite\\_map.html](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Onsite/onsite_map.html). To learn more about training offered for wastewater professionals, visit the Missouri Smallflows Organization at <http://www.mosmallflows.org>

# GET PUMPED!

A SEPTIC SYSTEM EDUCATION KIT FOR LAKE HOMEOWNERS

## Did You Know?

- The pumping process should remove all scum, sludge, and liquid from the septic tank. It also requires flushing and backflushing liquid contents to ensure no floating scum is left in the tank to plug the outlet or enter the drainfield.
- The tank should be pumped through the manhole rather than the inspection ports, which could damage the baffles in the tank and result in wastewater flowing directly into the drainfield without allowing solids to settle out.
- Frequency of pumping is affected by the size or capacity of the tank, the amount of wastewater entering the tank, and the volume of solids in the wastewater.

**DO** use only a certified professional to inspect your tank every three years.

**DO** be present when your system is inspected and ask questions of the inspector.

**DO** keep a record of all inspections, pumpings, repairs, reports, etc. for future reference.

**DON'T** attempt to inspect and/or pump the septic tank yourself. This can be dangerous and is illegal.

**DON'T** add a starter to the tank after having it pumped. There are enough bacteria remaining in the tank and wastewater to ensure proper function.

## For More Information

The Groundwater Foundation

<http://www.groundwater.org>

United States Environmental Protection Agency

<http://cfpub.epa.gov/owm/septic/home.cfm>

National On-site Wastewater Recycling Association

<http://www.nowra.org/>

National Environmental Service Center

<http://www.nesc.wvu.edu>

National Small Flows Clearinghouse

[http://www.nsfsc.wvu.edu/nsfc/nsfc\\_index.htm](http://www.nsfsc.wvu.edu/nsfc/nsfc_index.htm)

University of Nebraska On-site Wastewater Center

<http://wastewater.unl.edu/>

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension

<http://www.extension.unl.edu/>

University of Minnesota Onsite Sewage Treatment Program

<http://septic.umn.edu/>

