



Homebuyer's Guide to Septic Systems

Inspection Procedure If the home you are buying is on a septic system you should request an inspection and assessment of the system. By law, only a state-licensed septic tank contractor or plumber or a certified environmental health professional can inspect and assess your septic system. The evaluator must provide you a copy of the Department of Health *Procedure for Voluntary Inspection and Assessment of Existing Systems* and written notice of your right to request an evaluation based on all or part of the standards.

Tank Inspection All system tanks should be pumped and visually inspected to determine their capacity and water tightness. The evaluator will look for cracks, leaks and other defects in the tanks, as well as, required outlet devices or filters and the condition and fit of the lid and access ports. If the tank was pumped and evaluated in the last 5 years that documentation may be used.

Drainfield Inspection The drainfield area should be probed to determine its location, size, configuration, and type of drainfield material. The inspector will note signs of failure and any drainage that impacts the drainfield area. The elevation of the drainfield above the seasonal high watertable should be made as this separation is critical for proper treatment.

Additional Components If your system contains additional components, such as pumps or alarms, they should also be inspected. Dosing pumps should be checked to verify correct operation and alarms are in working order.

Assessment The evaluator will provide you a signed report. The report must indicate if the system is, in the evaluator's opinion, a sanitary nuisance and any maintenance needs. A sample report form is on the reverse side of this information sheet.

Q: Why would I request a voluntary septic system inspection?

A: These systems are underground and may have been out of use for some time. Repairs or system modifications may be costly. A system evaluation would allow these costs to be addressed during sale negotiations.

Q: Where can I obtain a copy of the "Procedure for Voluntary Inspection and Assessment of Existing Systems?"

A: A copy is available online—www.FloridaHealth.gov under Environmental Health, Onsite Sewage Programs, Forms and Publications.

Q: If the evaluation shows my system is substandard, will I be required to upgrade the system?

A: No. The evaluation is for your use. The department does not receive a copy and no enforcement action will be taken based on the report. The report is intended to let you make an informed decision.

Q: Is a permit required to correct any deficiencies?

A: Yes. All repairs or modifications to an onsite sewage system require a construction permit from the Department of Health, Environmental Health Office in your county.

Q: Does an evaluation assure me that my system will function properly for years to come?

A: No. The evaluation provides an assessment of your system, but is not designed to determine precise code compliance or show that the system will serve your intended use.

Q: If the evaluation was not performed in accordance with the "Procedure for Voluntary Inspection and Assessment of Existing Systems" what can I do?

A: You may file a complaint with the Department of Health in your county or call the Bureau of Environmental Health at 850-245-4070.

Avoid flushing thousands of dollars in repairs down the drain. Maintain your septic system. Have your septic tank inspected and pumped out every three to five years by a licensed septic tank contractor. To find one, go to FloridaHealth.gov.



Division of Disease Control and Health Protection Bureau of Environmental Health

4052 Bald Cypress Way, Bin A-08 • Tallahassee, FL 32399-1710
850.245.4070

www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health

Low Implemented: 381.0065, Florida Statutes. Rule Authority: Chapter 64E-6.001, Florida Administrative Code.

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Voluntary Inspection and Assessment Report

Voluntary Inspection and Assessment of an Existing Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal System

Property Street Address: _____ City: _____ State: Florida Zip: _____

I have ownership, control or use of the onsite sewage treatment and disposal system at the property listed above and request an inspection except for the items I have initialed to request that they be excluded.

Signature of requestor: _____

Printed name of requestor: _____

Tank Inspection: Owner's initials to request that the tank inspection NOT be included	
<input type="checkbox"/> The tank has been pumped and capacity is: _____ gallons. <input type="checkbox"/> I have waived the pumping requirement because proof of a tank pumping, permitted new installation, permitted repair, or permitted modification can be documented within the previous five years, and the document states the capacity of the tank and that the condition of the tank does not constitute a sanitary nuisance. My visual inspection of the tank when the tank was empty detected the following cracks, leaks, or other defects: _____ _____	Baffles or tees are intact and secure: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Outlet device <input type="checkbox"/> present <input type="checkbox"/> not present Condition: _____ Effluent filters <input type="checkbox"/> present <input type="checkbox"/> not present Condition: _____ Compartment walls <input type="checkbox"/> present <input type="checkbox"/> not present Condition: _____ Structural defects in the tank: _____ Condition and fit of the tank lid, including manholes: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> The tank, in my professional opinion, is in danger of being damaged by leaving the tank empty after inspection, and was refilled with water prior to concluding the inspection.

Drainfield Inspection: Owner's initials to request that the drainfield inspection NOT be included.	
I have probed the drainfield area to determine its location and approximate size. Drainfield size: _____ sq. ft. Describe drainfield location: _____ Drainfield configuration: <input type="checkbox"/> Bed <input type="checkbox"/> Trench Drainfield is made of: <input type="checkbox"/> Mineral Aggregate <input type="checkbox"/> Non-mineral aggregate <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic chambers. Indications of previous failure: _____	Is there ponded water within the drainfield? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Is there even distribution of effluent in the field? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Are there downspouts or drains that encroach or drain into the drainfield area? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Based on augering and examining soils in the area of the drainfield, the estimated seasonal high water table in the area of the drainfield is: _____ inches <input type="checkbox"/> above <input type="checkbox"/> below the bottom of the drainfield.

Pump, Siphon, Alarm Inspection: Owner's initials to request that pumps, siphons and alarms NOT be inspected.	
Dosing tank integrity: _____ Approximate volume of dosing tank: _____ Material used in construction of the dosing tank (i.e., concrete, fiberglass, plastic): _____ Is the pump elevated off the bottom of the chamber? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Pump operational status: _____ If there is a check valve, is a purge hole present? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	Type of alarm (<input type="checkbox"/> audio <input type="checkbox"/> visual <input type="checkbox"/> both) Location of alarm: _____ Does the alarm work? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Do electrical connections appear satisfactory? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Can surface water infiltrate into the tank? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Was the pump tank pumped out? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no

Assessment: In my professional opinion, the system <input type="checkbox"/> is <input type="checkbox"/> is not a sanitary nuisance through: <input type="checkbox"/> allowing the discharge of untreated or improperly treated human waste. <input type="checkbox"/> the improperly built or maintained sewage treatment tank. <input type="checkbox"/> the creation, maintenance or causing of any condition capable of breeding flies, mosquitoes or any other arthropods capable of transmitting diseases directly or indirectly to humans. The following maintenance needs to be performed on the system: _____	
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Disclosure Statements: <input type="checkbox"/> I detected cracks, leaks, improper fit or other defects in the tank, manholes or lid. The following damaged or defective item or tank must be properly corrected: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> I detected missing or damaged components of the system. The following missing or damaged component must be replaced or an approvable replacement must be reinstalled in the system: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> I detected the following previous failure indicators: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> I detected ponding of the drainfield or uneven distribution of effluent. The extent of the ponding or uneven distribution is as follows: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> I detected the following downspouts or other stormwater or other source of water directed toward the system and they should be re-directed away from the system: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> I detected the seasonal high water table at or above the elevation of the drainfield. There is an increased probability of system malfunction due to the presence of groundwater at these levels. <input type="checkbox"/> I detected the following condition or situation existing on the site at the time of the inspection that, in my opinion, would possibly interfere with or restrict any future repair or modification to the existing system: _____	
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I am a master septic tank contractor registered septic tank contractor state-licensed plumber certified environmental health professional.

Inspection date: _____
 Inspector's signature: _____
 Inspector's printed name: _____
 Inspector's address: _____

A copy of the Procedure for Voluntary Inspection and Assessment of Existing Systems is required to accompany this report.

Inspectors may use this form or develop their own report that meets the requirements of 381.0065(3)(a), Florida Statutes, and 64E-6.001(5), Florida Administrative Code.



Protecting Your Home,

Caring for Your Septic System

Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental Health

Your home is one of your greatest assets. In fact, for families of all kinds, it is a place of comfort and a source of great pride. But, did you realize that you can better protect the value of your home by taking good care of your septic system? Without a doubt, a key reason to maintain your septic system is money! Failing septic systems are not only expensive to repair and replace, they are something you can avoid.

Simple Steps, Long-lasting

Results To avoid flushing thousands of dollars in repairs down the drain, keep your septic system in good working condition. This type of safe treatment of sewage prevents the spread of infection and disease and protects your water. Also, when a septic tank is working properly, it naturally removes most of the pollutants that can make you sick. If you follow these steps, your septic system will function to protect your health and your investment.

Remember the 3 Ps

PUMP

■ Pump your tank at least every 3 to 5 years to help ensure it continues to work properly.

■ Waste and kitchen garbage disposal material can build up over time, so pumping your system is an important step.

■ Have your septic system inspected every 3 years by a licensed sewage disposal company to check for any problems.

■ Having your system inspected and pumped on a regular basis is a bargain when you consider the cost of replacing the entire system.

PROTECT

■ Do not drive over or park vehicles on your septic tank or drainfield.

■ Plant only grass over and near your drainfield to avoid damage from roots.

■ Make sure your gutter downspouts are directed away from the drainfield area.

■ Fix leaky toilets and dripping faucets as soon as possible.

PREVENT

■ Use your toilet to flush human waste only. Anything other than human waste can clog and possibly damage your septic system.

■ Do not pour household products, such as cleansers, medicine, auto fluids, paint and lawn care products down the drain. These items can pollute surface and ground water, which supplies your drinking water. It may also end up in your local rivers, lakes and coastal waters.

■ Compost your kitchen scraps rather than use your garbage disposal, to help your septic system last longer.

Do Not Waste Water Your system is sized on an expected average use of 50 gallons per person per day. Dripping faucets can waste about 2,000 gallons of water each year. Leaky toilets can waste as much as 200 gallons each day. Overloading your system with water is the number one cause of failure. So, remember to:

■ Fill the bathtub with only as much water as you need.

■ Turn off faucets while shaving or brushing your teeth.

■ Run the dishwasher and clothes washer only when they are full.

■ Make sure all faucets are completely turned off when not in use.

■ Install water saving showerheads that release low levels of water.

■ Make sure your toilets and faucets do not leak.

Do Not Overload Your Drainfield

■ Keep roof drains and other rainwater or surface drainage systems away from the drainfield.

■ Flooding the drainfield with too much water slows down or stops the treatment processes and can cause plumbing to back up.

■ Distribute your laundry loads over the week.

■ Your washing machine discharges 40 to 50 gallons every wash load and doing load after load on a single day can stress and overload your system.

■ Consider composting rather than using a garbage disposal. This reduces the burden on your septic system while providing compost to make your garden grow.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

■ For additional information on your septic system, contact the environmental health section at your county health department. You can also visit U.S. EPA sites: www.epa.gov/own/onsite or www.epa.gov/own/water-conservation.

■ For a listing of licensed septic tanks contractors visit: FloridaHealth.gov/healthy-environments/ and select "Onsite Sewage Programs."





Septic Systems—What to Do after the Flood

Where can I find information on my septic system?

Please contact your local health department for additional advice and assistance. For more information on onsite/decentralized wastewater systems, call the National Environmental Services Center at (800) 624-8301 or visit their website at www.nesc.wvu.edu.



Do I pump my tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions?

No! At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes. The best solution is to plug all drains in the basement and drastically reduce water use in the house.

What if my septic system has been used to dispose wastewater from my business (either a home-based or small business)?

In addition to raw sewage, small businesses may use their septic system to dispose of wastewater containing chemicals. If your septic system that receives chemicals backs up into a basement or drain field take extra precautions to prevent skin, eye and inhalation contact. The proper clean-up depends of what chemicals are found in the wastewater. Contact your State or EPA for specific clean-up information.

What do I do with my septic system after the flood?

Once floodwaters have receded, there are several things homeowners should remember:

- Do not drink well water until it is tested. Contact your local health department.
- Do not use the sewage system until water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.
- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Contact your health department for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.

- Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and lift station. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the soil absorption field's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

Remember: Whenever the water table is high or your sewage system is threatened by flooding there is a risk that sewage will back up into your home. The only way to prevent this backup is to relieve pressure on the system by using it less.

1. What are some suggestions offered by experts for homeowners with flooded septic systems?
2. Use common sense. If possible, don't use the system if the soil is saturated and flooded. The wastewater will not be treated and will become a source of pollution. Conserve water as much as possible while the system restores itself and the water table falls.
3. Prevent silt from entering septic systems that have pump chambers. When the pump chambers are flooded, silt has a tendency to settle in the chambers and will clog the drainfield if it is not removed.
4. Do not open the septic tank for pumping while the soil is still saturated. Mud and silt may enter the tank and end up in the drainfield. Furthermore, pumping out a tank that is in saturated soil may cause it to "pop out" of the ground. (Likewise, recently installed systems may "pop out" of the ground more readily than older systems because the soil has not had enough time to settle and compact.)
5. Do not dig into the tank or drainfield area while the soil is still wet or flooded. Try to avoid any work on or around the disposal field with heavy machinery while the soil is still wet. These activities will ruin the soil conductivity.
6. Flooding of the septic tank will have lifted the floating crust of fats and grease in the septic tank. Some of this scum may have floated and/or partially plugged the outlet tee. If the septic system backs up into the house check the tank first for outlet blockage. Clean up any floodwater in the house without dumping it into the sink or toilet and allow enough time for the water to recede. Floodwaters from the house that are passed through or pumped through the septic tank will cause higher flows through the system. This may cause solids to transfer from the septic tank to the drainfield and will cause clogging.
7. Locate any electrical or mechanical devices the system may have that could be flooded to avoid contact with them until they are dry and clean.
8. Aerobic plants, upflow filters, trickling filters, and other media filters have a tendency to clog due to mud and sediment. These systems will need to be washed and raked.