

# Requirements for SEPTIC SYSTEMS OWNERS

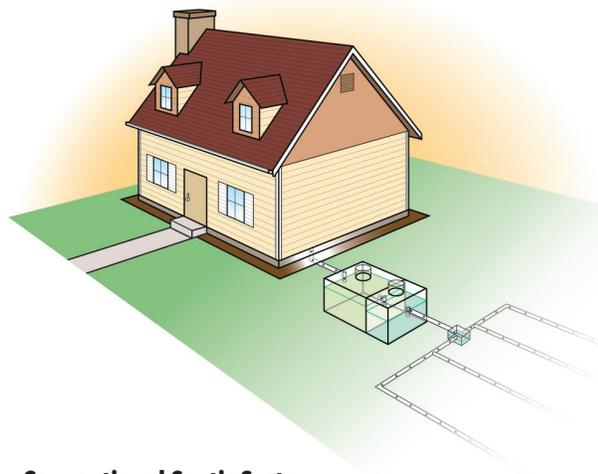
Better understand how changes to the Private Sewage Disposal Code will affect you, as a septic system owner in Illinois. This guide summarizes some of the important changes regarding maintenance and record-keeping requirements for septic system owners.



If you are a NEW homebuyer this guide will provide you with important information if your property is served by a septic system. Ensuring a properly-working septic system at the time of the property transfer is very important for a new homeowner.

## Introduction

If you live in an area that is not served by municipal or sanitary district sewers, you will need to install an on-site system to treat wastewater. While commonly called "septic systems," the systems can range from a standard tank and drain field to more complex systems that involve pumps, air compressors, and other types of mechanical devices.



**Conventional Septic System**

## Common Failure Symptoms

- Slowly draining sinks and toilets
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing
- Plumbing backups
- Sewage odors in the house or yard
- Ground is wet or mushy above your septic system's absorption field



- Grass is greener or grows faster above your absorption field



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## What You Should Know About Your Septic System

- What type of septic system do you have?
- Where is it located?
- Is the septic system working properly?
- Has it been maintained in the past?
- If the system was inspected, verify that the inspector was a Licensed Private Sewage Installation Contractor or a Licensed Environmental Health Practitioner.
- Is there a sketch or diagram of the system?
- Was the system uncovered to inspect the size and condition of the tank?
- Are current photos included?
- Has the house been recently occupied? If the system has not been in use, it will be hard to determine if a potential problem exists.
- Check for the age of the septic system permit.
- Has there been remodeling or an addition to the house?

In addition to obtaining information from the seller, buyers are encouraged to contact the local health department. Permits are required for installation of specific systems, and this permit should include information on where the system is located, age of the system, and size of the tank and lateral fields (if applicable).

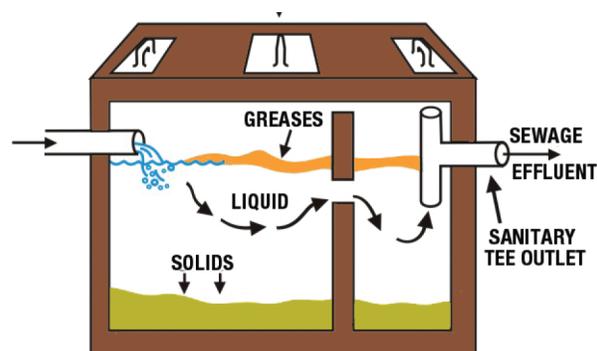
New technologies have provided alternatives that allow wastewater treatment in areas where site conditions may prohibit or severely limit traditional systems. Illinois law has been updated to permit innovation, but these new technologies typically require an "experimental use permit" issued to the homeowner or the contractor to be approved by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

Why should you care about your on-site system? Because failure of the system has the potential to create both health and environment consequences (odor, contamination of drinking water), and damage to your property and could ultimately result in significant costs to repair the system. Even if a system appears to be working, it may not be treating wastewater adequately. That is why it is critical to make sure your septic system is functioning properly.

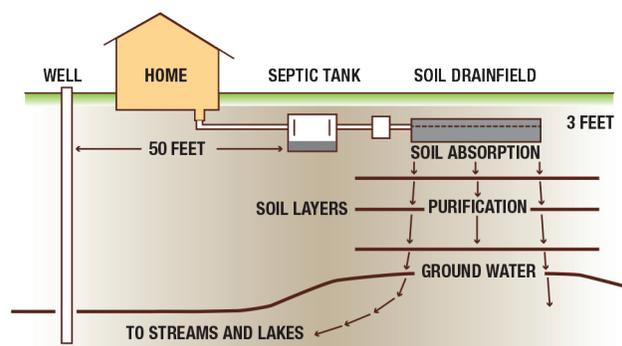
## Buying or Selling a House

Before purchasing a house served by a septic system, all BUYERS are encouraged to have the septic system inspected prior to the purchase or transfer of the property. This is suggested because the cost of a replacement septic system or repair of an existing system can be expensive. Be aware that some units of local government mandate an inspection of property prior to occupancy. Lenders may also require that you have an inspection as a condition of getting financing.

SELLERS of the property are required to disclose whether they are aware of material defects in their septic system. A professional inspection can help identify potential issues with the system.



**Two-Compartment Septic System**



**Wastewater Treatment and disposal in the soil**

## Maintenance Requirements of Septic Systems Mandated by State Law

The State of Illinois recently adopted changes to the Private Sewage Disposal Code\*, and some of these changes affect what is now required of septic system property owners when it comes to maintenance and record-keeping of those systems. The changes are as follows:

After January 1, 2014, when you contract with an installer, you are required to provide a signature on the installation construction permit for any private sewage disposal system being installed, repaired, or renovated. This serves as written acknowledgment that you, as the property owner are aware of and accept the responsibility to service and maintain the private sewage disposal system in accordance with State law and local ordinances.

The property owners of the private sewage disposal system shall log and maintain all maintenance records on forms provided (or approved) by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and make records available upon request by the IDPH or local authority. BE AWARE: These records are REQUIRED to be transferred from owner to owner and kept for the life of the system.

After January 1, 2014, private sewage disposal systems installed and permitted are required to be maintained and serviced to ensure proper operation. The system may be evaluated by the homeowner, a licensed Private Sewage Disposal System Installation Contractor, a licensed Environmental Health Practitioner, an Illinois licensed Professional Engineer, a representative of the IDPH, or an agent of the IDPH or local health department in accordance with the following:

### 1. Septic tank to a subsurface seepage system or septic tank followed by a sand filter discharging to a subsurface seepage system.

- Private sewage disposal system septic tanks serving residential properties **MUST** be evaluated prior to or within three years after the date of installation of the system. (\*Source: Amended at 37Ill. Reg.14994, effective August 28, 2013)

After the first evaluation, the system **MUST** be evaluated a minimum of once every five years. Depending on the system's use, the tanks and compartments may need to be evaluated and pumped more frequently.

- Private sewage disposal system septic tanks serving non-residential property **MUST** be evaluated within four years after the date of installation of the system. After the first evaluation, the system shall be evaluated at minimum once every three years. Depending on the system's use, the tanks and compartments may need to be evaluated and pumped more frequently.

## Septic System Inspections

An evaluation of the system should be completed by a Licensed Private Sewage Installation Contractor or a Licensed Environmental Health Practitioner. For a list of licensees go to the Illinois Department of Public Health website: [www.dph.illinois.gov](http://www.dph.illinois.gov).

For aerobic treatment units or sand filters, an evaluation can assure you that the system meets required maintenance and surface discharge requirements. If problems are noted, information on what repairs will be necessary to bring the system up to code requirements should be included.

*(Information provided, in part, by the University of Illinois Extension Services)*



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**2. An aerobic treatment unit (ATU) requires evaluation and maintenance at least once every 6 months.** NOTE: While the homeowner of an ATU may conduct the inspection and maintenance, the inspection and maintenance must be performed per the manufacturer's requirements to assure proper operation. If the required inspections and maintenance are not performed, the system is in violation of the Act.

**3. Sand filter and waste stabilization ponds with surface discharges require an evaluation to determine whether the tanks and all of the compartments of the private sewage disposal system have layers of scum and settled solids greater than 33% of the liquid capacity of the tank.**

The system **MUST** be evaluated a minimum of once every year. Depending on the system's use, the tanks and compartments may need to be evaluated and pumped more frequently. NOTE: While the homeowner of a sand filter or waste stabilization pond may conduct the inspection and maintenance the inspection and maintenance must be performed per the requirements of this Act to assure proper operation.

**4. All other private sewage disposal systems that are not listed MUST be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications or based on a maintenance interval approved by the IDPH.**



**To Be Sure: If you have to do any repairs to your septic system, always contact your county health department.**

**5. The owner of a private sewage disposal system may submit an alternative maintenance interval to the IDPH for approval.**

The IDPH will evaluate the alternative interval on a case-by-case basis. The granted approval is **NOT** transferrable from owner to owner. A change in ownership or use of the private sewage disposal system will void the approval.

The failure to properly operate, maintain and have routine service conducted on a private sewage disposal system is a violation of the State law.

## For Additional Information

Visit the Illinois Department of Public Health website, [www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/environmental-health-protection/private-sewage-disposal](http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/environmental-health-protection/private-sewage-disposal)

You are also advised to contact your local health department to obtain information on requirements for your type of septic system including your responsibility under State and local law for long-term maintenance of that system. Please be aware that local ordinances can vary from county to county.



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