WHAT TO EXPECT DURING A

SEPTIC SYSTEM ROUTINE MAINTENANCE INSPECTION

Regular maintenance of your septic system will keep your system working efficiently and can prevent costly repairs. Inspections also can save you money by preventing unnecessary pump-outs, and a well-maintained system helps protect water quality.

You are encouraged to observe the inspection, using the checklist of standard RI DEM procedures below, so that you can have confidence in the results. If you believe the inspection was not completed properly, please contact your local wastewater management authority.

WHAT WILL THE INSPECTOR DO?

1. Determine Property and Background Information

The inspector will need a copy of the previous inspection report as well as a copy of the permit or design plan, which you can provide, if you have one. The inspector also will ask about everyday water use practices in order to better understand how well your system is functioning.

- ❒ Check the previous inspection report to determine the age of the system, type of system, and household appliances present.
- ❒ Check for any system repair or upgrades since the last inspection.
- ❒ Check for daily flow increase or decrease since the last inspection.

The inspector may use a probe to locate the system.

2. Find the Tank and Evaluate the Site

- ❒ Check for impermeable surfaces, heavy objects, or large trees over the drainfield.
- ❒ Check for odors, ponding, or soggy areas.
- ❒ Check vegetation such as lush green grass or burnt-out grass.
- ❒ Check the landscape position for possible runoff.

3. Evaluate the Tank

- ❒ Check the effluent level in the tank, as this can indicate leaks or backups.
- ❒ Record solids accumulation.
  By checking the solids accumulation since the last inspection, the inspector can recommend a pump-out schedule.
- ❒ Check the condition of baffles. Baffles are critical because they control the flow of suspended solids within the tank and help prevent their exit to the drainfield.
- ❒ Check the overall structure of the tank.

4. Pump-Out

Pumping is recommended when total solids accumulation is between 35 – 50% of the tank volume. Check with your town hall for specific pump-out requirements.
A pump-out performed during an inspection should include the following tasks.

- ❒ Check for drainback to the tank from the leachfield.
- ❒ Check the condition of the tank weep hole and midseam.
- ❒ Check the overall structure of the empty tank.

5. Check the Effluent Screen if Present

Effluent screens (also called outlet screens) are recommended as an inexpensive preventative measure.

- ❒ Check if the screen needs cleaning.
- ❒ Hose the screen off into the inlet side of the septic tank.
- ❒ Recommend a cleaning interval.

6. Provide Results and Recommendations

- ❒ Evaluate the overall system and identify any needed repairs.
- ❒ Determine whether a pump-out is necessary and suggest a routine pump-out interval based on solids accumulation.
- ❒ Complete recommendations and suggest the next service date.
- ❒ Submit required documentation to the homeowner and to the town.

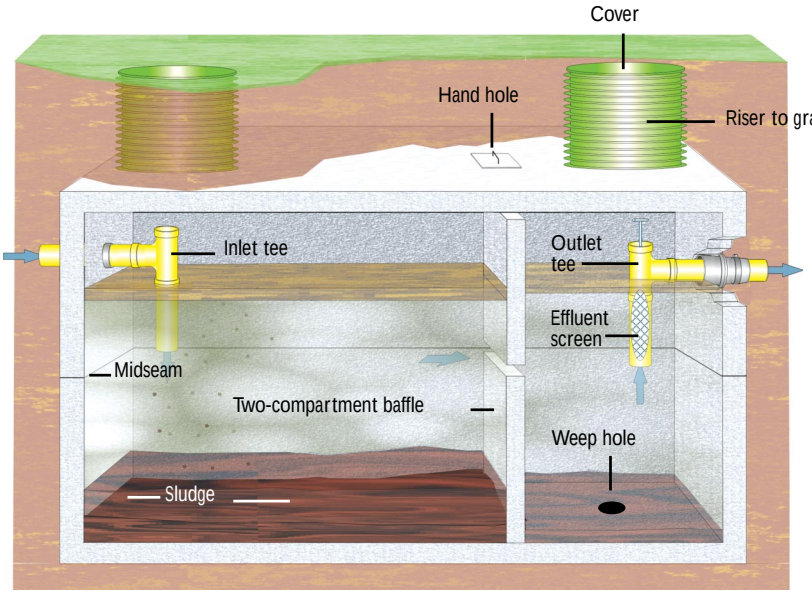

Diagram of a two-compartment septic tank with access risers and an effluent screen.

Additional Information Is Available

This series also includes fact sheets about first maintenance inspections, pump-outs, and recommended septic system upgrades such as effluent screens and access risers. Additional information is available at: http://www.uri.edu/ce/wq or call the URI Onsite Wastewater Training Center at 401-874-5950.

Septic System Checkup: The Rhode Island Handbook for Inspection. RI Department of Environmental Management. Available at www.state.RI.us/dem. Additional information is available at: www.uri.edu/ce/wq/owtc/html/owtc.html

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