

Charlestown's 2005 Septic Maintenance Program

What You Need to Know

This fact sheet explains the requirements of the May 2004 Ordinance that is designed to enhance system performance and longevity, while minimizing costs to homeowners. An especially attractive element of the program is the flexibility of inspection frequency that is based on the system's history; how often you have your system inspected can be adjusted in order to match the need for pumping, and thus can vary from one to five years.

SAFEWATER



What's Required

You will receive a Town notice indicating when your next inspection is required. If you, the system owner, fail to complete the inspection by the assigned date, a fine can be imposed.

Ensure that your service provider is approved by the Town. A list of approved service providers (inspectors) is available from the Wastewater Specialist. The service provider will follow inspection procedures specified in the RIDEM handbook and the Charlestown Wastewater Ordinance. Advanced systems and cesspools have special inspection requirements.

Inspections are required every one to five years, based on system condition, use, and previous inspection results. Advanced systems and cesspools must be inspected annually. Systems must be inspected whenever a property is sold. If the recommended frequency of inspections changes, the service provider and/or homeowner must notify the Wastewater Specialist.

Pumpout need is based on inspection results. If the tank does not need pumping

at the time of inspection, the next inspection will be scheduled. *Tanks in use must be pumped at least once every six years.*

Preparing for the Inspection

The cost of an inspection depends partly on the time required. Save money by preparing in advance. Here are the steps:

Collect data on your system and gather past inspection reports. If you have none and your system was installed after 1968, a copy of the approved design may be available at the Charlestown Town Hall.

Get informed about the inspection process and your options. The Wastewater Specialist has information on the inspection process and options that may lower the cost of future inspections and improve system performance.

Be present for the inspection. By getting to know your system and discussing its use and history with the service provider, he may have information on actions or enhancements that can help you save money and protect your system.

Standard septic systems are a major source of pollution to Charlestown's groundwater supplies, salt ponds, and inland waters.

To protect these vital natural resources, the Town amended the Wastewater Management Ordinance in 2004 to require replacement of cesspools by 2009 and use of two-compartment tanks for new tank installations.

For Information and Assistance: Call the Wastewater Management Specialist at 364-5030. Or visit the website at: <http://charlestownri.org/>



The Inspection Process

The service provider should first check the drainage area for evidence of a system failure, check the tank for evidence of leaks or system backup, and then measure solids accumulation to see if pumping is needed. If the tank is pumped, it must be inspected again while empty. Pumping is standard procedure at the **First Maintenance Inspection**.

The service provider will prepare a report that describes the system, identifies maintenance requirements, and recommends a schedule for the next **Routine Maintenance Inspection** and pump out. The schedule is based on system use, condition, and level of solids accumulation. The service provider also will submit the inspection report to the Town and provide you with a copy.

A Change of Ownership Inspection is required by the Town when a property is sold; it follows the same procedures as the First Maintenance Inspection. A **Point of Sale Inspection** may also be required by your bank, although the Town is not involved.

The Town will review the results and send a confirmation of the completed inspection and the date for your next inspection. The Town also will send you a reminder before your next inspection and pump out are due.

Inspection Results

You have a standard system in good repair. If your system needs to be pumped, you must have it done within 30 days of the inspection. If your system does not need to be pumped, a schedule for future inspection and pumping should be established by the service provider.

Your system requires repair or replacement. Property owners have 60 days to apply for a permit from the Department of Environmental Management (DEM). The contractor who will perform the work generally does this. It is recommended to get at least two bids for the work required.

The Wastewater Specialist can assist in the process and has fact sheets on how to choose a designer/installer.

You have a cesspool. It is sub-standard and will have to be replaced by 2009. It must be inspected and pumped annually prior to replacement. If it is a failed system, it cannot be repaired and must be replaced with a modern septic system immediately.

Additional Questions

What About Advanced Systems? Property owners with small lots or lots near surface waters, nearby wells, or other sensitive sites may need to install a system that treats wastewater more thoroughly. Owners of advanced systems are required to have annual inspections and maintenance contracts with the system manufacturer or an approved advanced treatment maintenance provider. In addition, effluent monitoring may be required.

Do You Need a New Tank? All new or replacement tanks must be watertight and have two compartments, a minimum capacity of 1500 gallons, and effluent screens, with at least one manhole cover and riser to grade.

Do You Need a New Leachfield? If the tank is not failing, you do not need to replace it simply because you are replacing the leachfield. However, small or older tanks are a major cause of leachfield failure, so it might be worthwhile considering an upgraded tank and leachfield.

Considering Upgrades for Your Tank? Installing access risers simplifies future inspections and reduces maintenance costs. An effluent screen is required for new tanks and homes with a garbage disposal; it keeps solids in the tank and prevents drainfield clogging.

Are Funds Available? The Wastewater Management Commission has small grants to help defray the costs associated with system maintenance, repair, or replacement: up to \$200 for effluent screens and risers, up to \$150 for locating the tank, and community loans at 2% interest.

For more information about reducing pump-outs and extending the life of your system, ask your Wastewater Specialist for The Septic Maintenance Fact Sheet Series:

What to Expect During a Septic Tank Pump-Out

What to Expect During a Septic System First Maintenance Inspection

What to Expect During a Septic System Routine Maintenance Inspection

Recommended Upgrades for Your Septic Tank

What You Can Do To Extend the Life of Your Septic System

