How You Can Save Wickford Harbor

- Have your septic system inspected once every three years and pumped as needed. Both steps are required by North Kingstown's Wastewater Management Ordinance.
- If you have a cesspool or substandard septic system, plan to replace it.
- Consider installing an advanced treatment septic system if you have a small yard, problem soils, or live near the harbor or one of its tributary streams.
- Low interest loans are available up to $15,000 to upgrade a failing or substandard system. Grants also may be available in some areas for advanced treatment systems.
- Consider installing an effluent filter to keep solids in the tank and prolong the life of your drainfield, and access risers to provide easy access for inspections and pumping.
- Conserve water. Reducing the amount of wastewater going into your septic system improves wastewater treatment. Install water saving devices such as faucet aerators.
- If you fertilize your lawn, use organic fertilizers and apply sparingly, no more than 1 or 2 lbs /1000 sq.ft annually. Organic fertilizers release nutrients gradually as they decompose so they are less likely to runoff.
- Limit lawn watering. North Kingstown's water use more than doubles in the summer, using precious drinking water. Overwatering lawns washes up to five times more nutrients into the groundwater than lawns receiving just enough water. Most lawns in New England survive without watering. Established lawns that turn brown during the summer are dormant, not dead. If you choose to water, water in the early morning and no more than once a week.
- If you live along the shore, plant a buffer of native shrubs and perennials between your yard and the water. A native plant buffer saves you time and money on maintenance, provides wildlife habitat, filters out pollutants, and discourages geese from using your property.
- Reduce runoff from your yard. Rain runoff can carry gas and oil from your driveway and excess fertilizers from your yard to the nearest stream and eventually Wickford Harbor. Divert rooftop runoff to lawns and other vegetated areas.
- For boaters, pump out your holding tank at a marine pump out station. In Wickford, pump outs are located at Brewers Marina and Wickford Marina.

For More Information...

To obtain a list of town-approved septic system inspectors, information on the Wastewater Management Ordinance, or low interest loans for septic repair, contact the North Kingstown Water Dept. at (401) 294-3331.

General information on statewide licensed designers, installers, and regulations: call (401) 222-6822 or: **http://www.state.ri.us/dem/programs/benviron/water/permits/isds/index.htm**

Septic system information including advanced treatment systems - URI Onsite Wastewater Training Center: **www.uri.edu/ce/wq**

For coastal homeowners' landscaping tips: **http://www.savebay.org/bayissues/backyardbay/index.htm**

URI Home*a*syst: **www.uri.edu/ce/wq** and URI GreenShare: **www.uri.edu/ce/factsheets**

Wickford Harbor Watershed Assessment - reports and maps at **www.uri.edu/ce/wq/mtp/wick/wick.html**

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Wickford Harbor - A Threatened Resource

Inner Wickford Harbor and downtown Wickford Village: once called the "Venice of Rhode Island" since historically the village was surrounded on all sides by water.

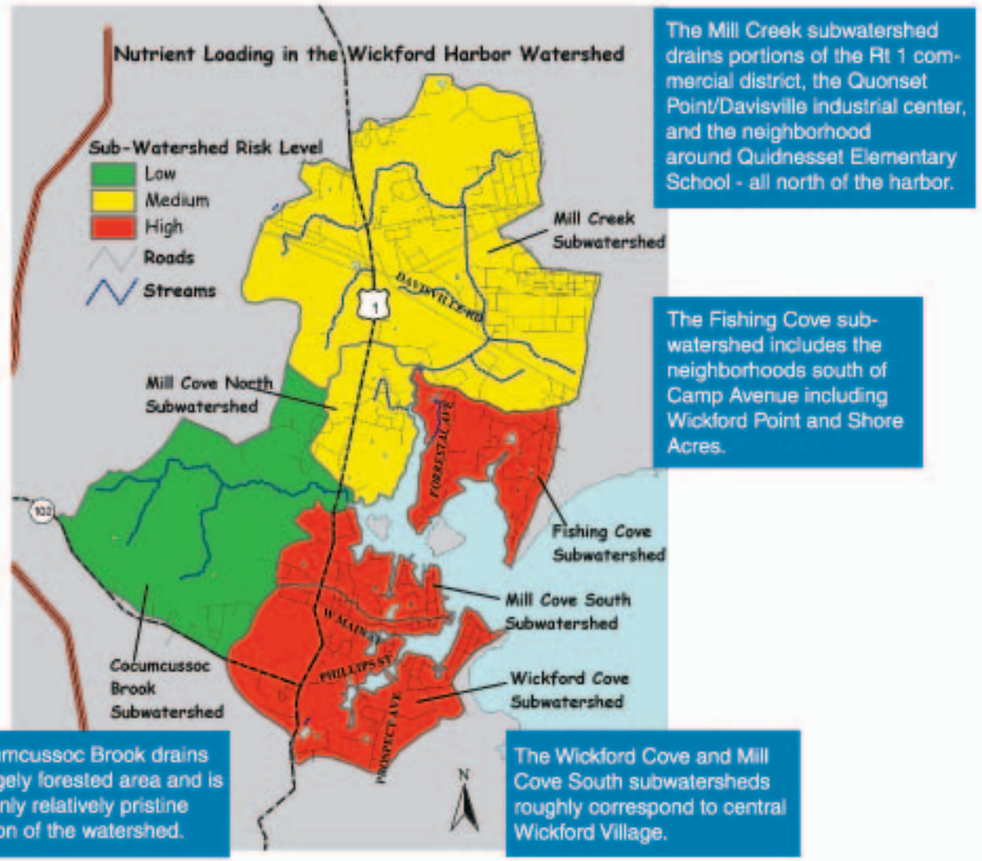
Wickford Harbor is a gem of the West Bay. Steeped in history, the harbor is a vibrant center of the community. Recreational paddling, boating and shellfishing are popular in Wickford Harbor's many coves.

Living Resources of Wickford Harbor: The harbor provides a valuable nursery for fish and wading birds. It also supports one of the few remaining eelgrass beds in Narragansett Bay. This important underwater grass filters pollutants and provides essential habitat for shellfish. Over the last four years, Save The Bay has worked to restore an eelgrass bed in Wickford Harbor near Sauga Point.

Threats to Wickford Harbor: Mats of algae like this sea lettuce signal that nutrients are overfertilizing the harbor. Nutrients, such as nitrogen, come from septic systems, road runoff, and lawn fertilizer. Too much nitrogen triggers uncontrolled growth of sea lettuce and free-floating algae, creating murky conditions that shade out valuable underwater plants such as eelgrass. When the algae dies it consumes oxygen in the water. The resulting low oxygen stresses marine life and can lead to fish kills. The thick, dense mats of sea lettuce make the harbor much less enjoyable for boating and swimming. Studies also show property values are directly related to water quality. In addition shellfishing and other sensitive uses will likely be lost unless action is taken to reduce pollution.

Pollution - We are the Source!

This fact sheet describes the results of a pollution risk assessment of Wickford Harbor, conducted by the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension and Save The Bay. This assessment evaluated pollution threats in the watershed by analyzing the type of land use and soil conditions. Several years of stream monitoring data support the results of the assessment.



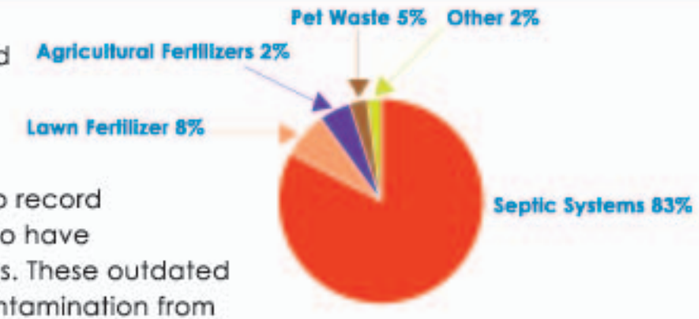
This map shows the six subwatersheds ranked according to the estimated amount of nutrient pollution generated within the Wickford Harbor watershed. The highest nutrient loading in the watershed originates from the Wickford Cove, Mill Cove South, and Fishing Cove subwatersheds. Shown in red, these areas have the highest septic system densities (1.2 systems per acre) in the watershed. The sparsely developed Cocumcussoc watershed, has the lowest nutrient loading.

Where in the watershed do you live?

The area of land that drains to Wickford Harbor, also known as the harbor's watershed is more than ten times larger than the harbor itself. It extends to Chadsey Road in the north and to Wickford Junction in the west. Water used in the watershed – for washing dishes, watering lawns, or flushing toilets – eventually finds its way to Wickford Harbor by either surface runoff or through groundwater. Because surface and groundwaters are connected, our routine activities and water use habits directly affect the quality of the harbor.

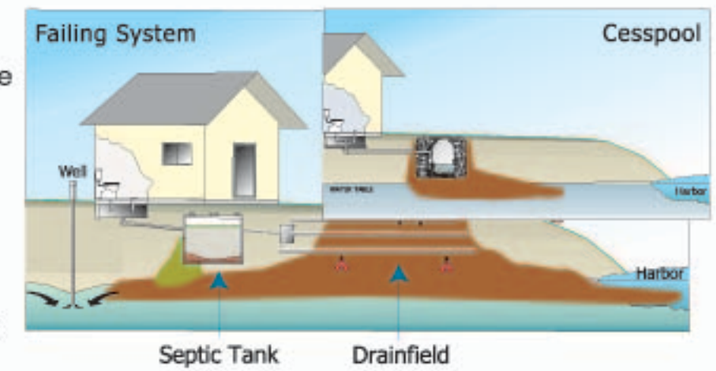
What is Polluting the Harbor?

Septic Systems

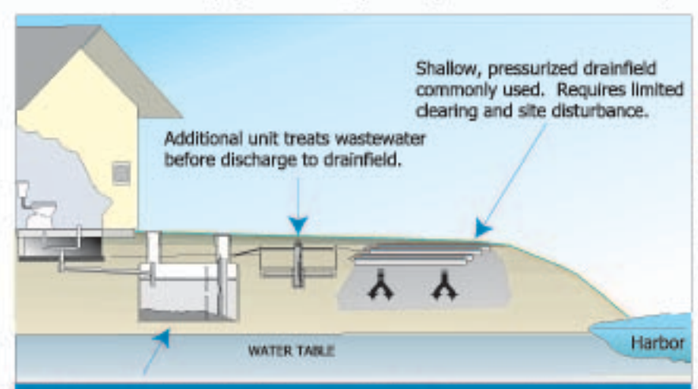


Septic systems contribute an estimated 80 percent of the nitrogen entering groundwater in Wickford Village. About 70 percent of Wickford Village homes were built before 1970, have no record of septic system repair, and are likely to have cesspools or other substandard systems. These outdated systems present the greatest risk of contamination from bacteria and nutrients. The risk of improperly treated wastwater effluent reaching the harbor is greatest in shoreline areas, in densely developed neighborhoods where systems are concentrated, and in problem soils with a high water table.

If you have a CESSPOOL plan to replace it. A cesspool is a covered pit that receives wastewater and allows it to drain into the surrounding soil. The walls might be stone or perforated concrete. Though common, cesspools don't treat wastewater. Solids and liquids seep directly through the soil into the groundwater. This poses a threat to surrounding bodies of water and nearby wells. If your house was built before 1970, you probably have a cesspool or other substandard system.



If you have a FAILING SEPTIC SYSTEM, plan to repair or replace it. Your system may be failing if you have sluggish drains or odor, squishy patches in the drainfield, wastewater backups into house or lush grass above the drainfield. Even if you don't notice any problem, your system still can be polluting groundwater.



Solids settle in tank. Risers at grade for easy access. Effluent filter to keep solids in tank.

If you live near the water, have a small lot, or problem soils, consider installing an ADVANCED WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM. One of the most important features of certain advanced treatment is much better removal of nitrogen, a source of nutrient pollution to Wickford Harbor. Regular inspection and routine maintenance is critical to keep these systems functioning properly.