



Septic systems and Source Water Protection

Septic systems treat on-site wastewater and eliminate the need for municipal sewers in rural areas. The most common septic system consists of a septic tank and leaching bed. In Ontario, the *Ontario Building Code* (OBC) governs nearly all rural septic systems.

Septic systems can be a source of contamination if they're not functioning properly. If these contaminants, such as bacteria, viruses or nitrate, reach a source of drinking water supply, they can cause health or environmental problems.

When working properly, septic systems can provide a safe and reliable way to treat your household wastewater.



Managing the risk

Septic systems near municipal wells and in vulnerable areas may need special attention when it comes to protecting source water. The *Clean Water Act, 2006*, the *Source Protection Plan* and the *Ontario Building Code* manage septic systems within vulnerable areas. All on-site sewage systems that are identified as a significant threat to municipal drinking water sources must be inspected every five years.

This program was established by the *Ontario Building Code* and is enforced by the area municipalities within Oxford County. The area municipality will contact the property owner prior to an inspection. Landowners may be required to make upgrades to their septic systems to reduce the identified risk to source water.

New septic systems (excluding replacement systems) may be prohibited in vulnerable areas surrounding municipal wells.



Signs of septic system failure

Failing septic systems can be hazardous to your health and the environment. Some signs of a malfunctioning system include:

- Household drains slow down or toilets backup
- Spongy and/or lush green grass and/or surface ponding on or near the leaching bed
- Sewage smell in house or yard
- Water quality issues in nearby wells



Caring for your septic system

It is important to care for your septic system. When properly designed, constructed and maintained, a septic system should provide long-term, effective treatment of your household wastewater. The following tips can help to protect both your investment and the environment:

- Have your tank regularly inspected by a licensed professional to identify ongoing or potential problems.
- Know where your tank and leaching bed are located and ensure your tank is pumped out every 3 to 5 years.
- Change effluent filters according to manufacturer instructions and replace damaged tanks.
- Do not build, construct or cover over the tank or leaching bed.
- Avoid parking vehicles on or driving over the tanks and leaching bed.
- Make sure all pumps and alarms are working
- Conserve water when possible and avoid excessive use of anti-bacterial soaps, bleaches, and harsh cleansers and chemicals. Be aware of what items should not be flushed down the toilet.

For more information:

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