



Sewage draining into a ditch is a significant public health hazard.

Why is this important to do before I buy the home?

Avoid unplanned repair and replacement costs before you buy

Sewage treatment by way of a septic system or sanitary sewer is required by law for all homes. If sewage is surfacing in the yard or draining into a nearby waterway, it poses a health risk. If the home you purchase uses a septic system that is not working properly, you may face significant repair or replacement costs.

Knowing what may need to be done to the system to make it work correctly before you buy the home allows you to negotiate with the seller to factor these repair costs/issues into the purchase agreement and price.

In short, it allows you to be a well-informed buyer which will ultimately help you to make a thoughtful decision on purchasing a new home.

If you do purchase a home with a septic system, make sure to continue to protect your investment!

Once I buy the house, how do I maintain my septic system?

Follow these maintenance tips to increase the life of the system

- **Have your septic tank pumped regularly.** Over time, sludge and scum can build up in a tank. Make sure to clean the tank every 3 years, including the effluent filter.
- **Monitor water usage.** Excessive water use can overload the system. Install a water meter to monitor usage and do not do all the washing or laundry at one time.
- **Be careful about what goes down the drain.** Avoid flushing any objects or substances that do not easily decompose. Do not use "septic tank additives" as they may do more harm than good.
- **Protect the system.** Do not drive or park heavy equipment over the absorption field or plant trees or shrubs within it.
- **Join the Allen County Onsite Wastewater Management District.** Benefits include regular inspections and preventative maintenance. For more information, call (260) 449-4181 or email to ACOWMD@allencounty.us



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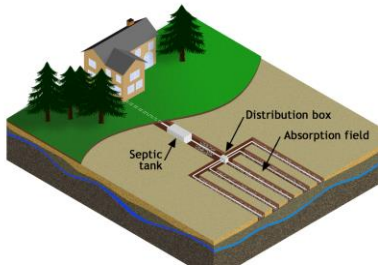
Inquire Before You Are a Buyer

A Guide to Septic System Evaluations for Prospective Home Buyers

What is a septic system?

Know the difference between a septic system and a sewer line

If your house is not connected to a sanitary sewer line, then it uses an onsite wastewater system, or what is commonly called a “private septic system.” The system (usually a tank and a drainage field) keeps and treats all of your wastewater on your own property. Since nearly all parts of the system are underground, it can take some investigation to find out what kind of system it is and if it is working properly. Is it one which uses the soil to properly treat the harmful bacteria in the wastewater and make it safe? Or does it use a tile to send that same harmful bacteria to the nearest ditch played in by the neighbor’s child or your dog?



Conventional septic system layout; Courtesy of Purdue Extension

I’m planning to buy a home with a septic system. What do I do?

Consider having a certified evaluation of the system conducted

A septic system may be the most expensive component of your home. The cost to install or replace these systems can range from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Unlike with a leaky roof or a faulty furnace, a failing septic can affect not only you and your family but your neighbors and the community as well. That is why it is important to know if the system is in good condition and working properly before purchasing a home.

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What is a certified septic evaluation?

Think of it like a home inspection, only for your septic system

Much like a home inspection looks at the components of a home, a certified evaluation of a septic system looks at all parts of the system to make sure they were installed correctly and are working properly. These inspections are conducted by certified septic system evaluators. The purpose of the evaluation is to ensure that the system is in good working order and that no repairs are needed prior to the sale.

Purchasing a home is an important decision. Make sure it is a safe, healthy and wise investment!

If a home is served by a septic system, a seller must provide a **disclosure form** to the prospective buyer and allow for an inspection. You can find a copy of the disclosure form and a list of certified evaluators by visiting www.allencountyhealth.com or calling (260) 449-7530. Once you have the list of certified evaluators, you can contact one directly.



Patches of lush green grass over a drain field or septic tank could be a sign of a failing system.



A certified evaluator will check the interior plumbing to make sure it is properly connected to the septic system and is without leaks.

So how does the evaluation work?

First step...

The certified evaluator will review the records at the local health department to see if a permit was issued at the time the system was installed and if any changes have been made to the system. If a record is not on file with the health department, the inspection process can still occur. But this could be a sign that it is an older system or was installed without a proper inspection.

Second step...

The evaluator will speak with the home seller, if possible, about system usage, maintenance and any problems that have occurred with the system.

Third step...

The evaluator will then examine every part of the system. Starting with the plumbing in the house, the evaluator will check for leaks and make sure all components properly drain to the septic tank. The septic tank, soil absorption field and all other parts of the system will be inspected for condition and functionality.

Finally...

A report is given to the seller and the prospective buyer that summarizes the findings, including any concerns with the system.

Env Services - Pollution Control
Allen County Department of Health