

- The possible presence of biological contaminants in the well water.

Because considerable skill is needed to evaluate well water quality and a septic system, the inspection should be done by a professional engineer or building inspector. There will be a charge for this service, but it is worth the expense if it avoids lawsuits or the deal falling through at the last minute.

Special Notes

Even a professional inspection may fail to identify septic system deficiencies or problems if the house is vacant at the time it is done. Thus, the buyer needs to make certain the evaluation was done when the system was being used normally for the previous 30 to 60 days. If the house is vacant or the seller's family was small, the buyer may want to negotiate that final acceptance of the house is conditional upon 30 to 60 days of normal use by the new family. In addition, inspections during the winter when there is snow on the ground or the soil above the absorption field is frozen can result in serious errors.

For More Information About Your Water and Septic System . . .

Check other fact sheets in the series.

- **SS-1 — What to Do if Your Septic System Fails**
 - **SS-2 — Maintaining Your Septic System**
 - **SS-3 — How to Conserve Water in Your Home and Yard**
 - **SS-5 — Your Septic System: Considerations When Building or Remodeling a Home**
- plus Extensions publication . . .*
- **FS-1 — Your Septic System**

This publication was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension as part of an educational project supported by a grant from the Water Resources Institute at Cornell University with funds provided by the New York State Legislature through the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Adapted by Jo Ellen Sumner, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rockland County, from a Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service bulletin.

PROJECT TEAM

A. MEYER Dutchess County
M. KEITH Putnam County
J. SAUMIER Rockland County
M. SHORTLIDGE Westchester County

Worksheet**

- Find and mark the location of the well and septic system (you may want to map this information in the space provided in *Cooperative Extension publication FS-1 — Your Septic System*.
- When was the septic tank last pumped? _____
- Is there any standing water, soggy ground or smelly liquid near the absorption field? No Yes
- Are there any areas over the drain field that appear highly compacted (i.e., roads or evidence of continued vehicle travel)? No Yes
- Have any major additions been made to the house after the present septic system was installed? No Yes
- Does the ground slope toward the septic tank or absorption field? No Yes
- Do neighbors indicate frequent problems with their septic systems or have they noticed problems with this system? No Yes
- Does the grass over the drain field appear much greener than the surrounding area, even during dry weather? No Yes
- Do toilets flush slowly and does water drain slowly from sinks and tubs, or do either "gurgle"? No Yes
- Does a water test indicate biological contamination of the well water? No Yes
- Is the septic system (tank and absorption field) less than 100 feet from the well or 100 feet from a lake, stream or pond or meet local codes which may be stricter? No Yes

If your answer to any of these questions is YES, the system may not be functioning properly. Consult a local health department representative or other professional for help.

****This worksheet and consultation with a local health department representative will help you make some preliminary judgments about the system you are evaluating, but is not as good as an on-site professional evaluation.**