



Minnesota
Pollution
Control
Agency

Policy and
Planning
Division

Community and
Area Wide
Programs
Section

Facts about individual sewage-treatment systems

Guide to hiring septic system professionals

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There are many reasons why property owners who have septic systems may need to hire a professional. Regular maintenance, system repair, inspection, design and new system installation are common activities done by professionals.

The ISTS Act

In 1994, the Minnesota Legislature passed the Individual Sewage Treatment Systems (ISTSs) Act. This law covers many areas related to septic systems, including minimum technical standards, disclosure at property transfer and a statewide licensing program for all ISTS businesses.

The licensing program

Effective April 1, 1996, all businesses that do septic system work must obtain a state license.

A business must have a \$10,000 bond and general liability insurance to be licensed. In addition, a licensed business must have at least one designated registered professional who has training, examination and experience in the specialty area(s) of the license.

Specialty areas for businesses and professionals

Licenses are issued to businesses with registered professionals in one or more specialty areas. The types of licenses and the functions they cover are:

Pumper. Removes septage from holding tanks, septic tanks, portable toilets; stores, hauls and properly disposes of septage; and identifies problems related to septic tanks and related piping and devices.

Designer II. Conducts site evaluations to properly locate a system and designs septic systems.

Designer I. In addition to performing the same functions as a Designer II, a business with this type of license also conducts septic system compliance inspections, issues written certificates of compliance, notices of noncompliance and inspection reports.

Installer. Constructs, installs, alters and repairs systems.

Inspector. Evaluates Designer II work; conducts compliance inspections, permitting and inspection activities; and issues written certificates of compliance, notices of noncompliance and inspection reports.

Finding a licensed business

Businesses may be licensed to cover all areas of work. For example, an installer also may be licensed to design systems, or a pumper licensed to install. Each designated registered professional has been issued a card that states the areas the business is licensed under.



Since all ISTS businesses must be licensed by the state, you can find them listed in your local telephone directory, and find out about them through advertisements or referrals from your neighbors. Licensing lists are available at your local government office and on the Web at

<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/programslists.html>.

Ask the business whether it is licensed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and what types of licenses it has. If it is not licensed, notify your ISTS area representative at (899) 657-3864.

Businesses and professionals that have a state license can work anywhere within Minnesota, so you are not limited to hiring someone from your immediate area.

Tips on hiring

The state license offers some consumer protection through the bonding and liability insurance requirements for businesses. In addition to assuring that the business is licensed, there are several things you can do to protect yourself.

Ask for references. When you get references, contact them. Call your local unit of government and ask if anyone has reported problems (like the number of system failures for an installer).

Ask what experience they have doing the type of work you need, especially if you have some special considerations.

Work out a contractual agreement and get it in writing. Ask what exactly will the contractor do for you. For example, if you need a new system installed, does the contract include sodding, seeding and landscaping?

Ask about guarantees and warranties. No one can guarantee a septic system will work for a specific number of years. (System longevity depends a great deal on how you use and maintain the system.) You

can still ask questions, such as what will the contractor do if you have system problems within the next year or two. Depending on the type of system installed, there may be warranties on pumps and other parts. Find out about this and put it all into your written contractual agreement.

Ask for a cost estimate. *This should not be the only consideration.* You want someone that will do it right, not just the least expensive. Some designers slightly overdesign a system for an added safety factor. This may increase initial installation cost, but result in lower, long-term costs or greater system longevity.

Additional questions to ask

All Businesses

What type of reporting/recordkeeping will be done? Businesses and local units of government should have copies of reports (inspection, design, as-built drawings, pumping records, etc.) on your system.

Pumpers

How will you pump and clean out my septic tank? The pumper should indicate that pumping will be done through the maintenance hole (not the 4" inspection pipe). When pumping through the maintenance hole, the pumper must remove all the materials in the tank and then backflush the tank to clean it. After cleaning, the pumper can verify that the tank is watertight and tank baffles are in place.

Installers

For how long do you guarantee your work? It is reasonable to request a written guarantee for at least one full year, to assure that the system is functioning properly and there are no freezing or settling problems.

Designers

How will you conduct my site evaluation and design? One or more site visits are necessary to establish the proper location for the system based on the soils, the

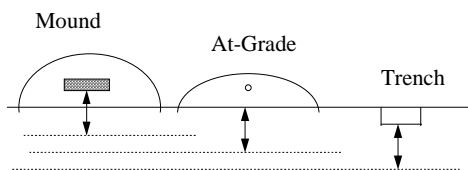


depth to seasonally saturated soil or bedrock and the natural slope of the land. Soil borings are required to determine soil texture (for system sizing) and color (to establish depth to saturated soil).

The design for a dwelling is based on the results of the site evaluation, including the items above, size of the home, number of water-using devices and the strength of the waste.

All soil treatment systems are designed to have at least three feet of vertical separation to seasonally saturated soil or bedrock. If the natural soil cannot provide the necessary separation, an above-ground system (mound or at-grade) must be designed.

3-Foot Vertical Separation



Inspectors

How will you evaluate that my system is working and meets requirements?

For existing systems, the inspection must include a determination that

1. the sewage tank is watertight,
2. there is no ground surface or surface water discharge,
3. there is at least 3 feet of vertical separation distance from the bottom of the soil treatment system area to saturated soil or bedrock, and
4. there is no imminent public health threat.

For new systems, the inspection must provide reasonable assurance that the system meets state requirements. This includes inspecting:

1. the tank(s);
2. the pump(s);
3. the soil treatment area;
4. system sizing;
5. setbacks to wells, waterlines, property lines, etc.;
6. materials; and
7. the vertical separation distance.

For more information

For more information, contact your local unit of government, visit the MPCA Web site at <http://www.pca.state.mn.us>, leave a message on the ISTS Information Line at (651) 282-6246, or contact your district representative at (800) 657-3864.