



Private Septic Systems Resource Sheet

Background

Problem

When operating functionally, septic systems recycle wastewater back into soils and groundwater supplies. However, when not operating functionally, these systems pose a danger to public health as well as to the environment and nearby water bodies. The EPA estimates that roughly 4 billion gallons of wastewater are dispersed below the ground's surface every day. Poorly functioning septic systems release bacteria, viruses, and toxic chemicals into the ground which eventually make their way into local waterways.

Solution

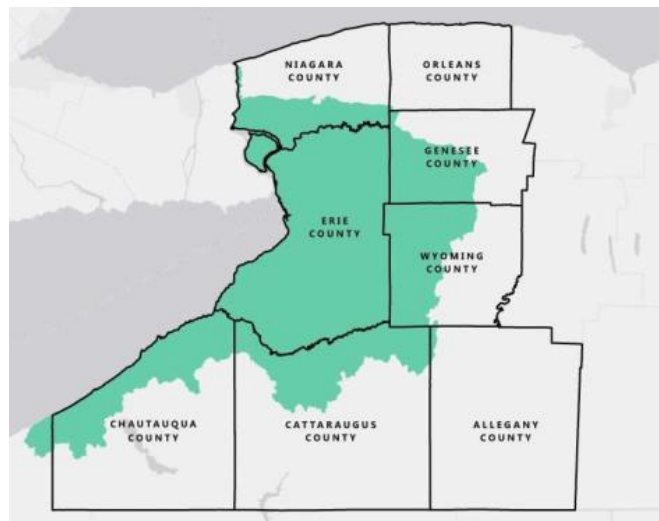
Some communities and governing bodies have enacted laws throughout New York State to increase the frequency of inspections and pump-outs to maintain public health, as the health of water bodies and the local environment. In some cases, a more regional approach is beneficial due to smaller communities aiming to protect water quality through inspection programs.

Septic Systems

Nationally, more than 21 million households use septic systems as their main wastewater system rather than public sewers. According to the EPA, septic tanks should generally be inspected every 1-3 years and pumped every 3-5 years. The frequency of pumping should depend on the tank size, number of people in the household, habits of water use, and the amount of solids accumulated in the tank. Currently, New York State only mandates that septic systems be inspected at the time of property transfer.

Never Flush:

- Cooking grease or oil
- Non-flushable wipes
- Photographic solutions
- Feminine hygiene products
- Dental floss
- Diapers
- Cigarette butts
- Coffee grounds
- Cat litter
- Paper towels
- Pharmaceuticals



Erie County Watershed By: Erie County Department of Environment and Planning



Septic System Drainage By: Samopauser. Source: Adobe Stock

Case Studies

LAKE GEORGE PARK COMMISSION, NY



Introduction

The Lake George Park Commission was established in 1988 in response to environmental threats facing Lake George from development activities, including uncontrolled dock and marina expansions, stormwater runoff, and other factors. The Commission acts as a full New York State Agency with the aim of protecting Lake George and the general public.

Septic System Inspection Program

Main features:

- Intermunicipal program for an entire watershed
- Requires regular inspections and actions if inspection is failed
- Regular interval of reports displaying data on findings from the program

Article 43 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law Provides special powers to park commissions.

- Includes the authority over wastewater discharges within the park to meet or exceed state standards



Stormwater Runoff Drain By:xadartstudio
Source: Adobe Stock

Wastewater Treatment System Inspection Program

Started in 2023, this program requires all wastewater treatment systems within the Lake George Basin be inspected every 5 years by a qualified wastewater inspector.

If the inspection fails:

- Owner is given 6 months to bring the system back into compliance
- Owner is given 5 years to replace the system entirely with one that meets or exceeds standards

If the inspection passes:

- No action is necessary until the next round of inspections in 5 years

2023 Inspection Results of 313 Systems

- 46.1% systems passed
- 22.9% systems failed
- 15.2% systems were found to be substandard
- 5.8% systems needed repair
- Most common reason for failure was the existence of a cesspool or clogged infiltration pipes



Lake George By: David
Source: Adobe Stock

Case Studies

WOLCOTT, NY



Introduction

Wolcott, New York is a town located in the northeastern corner of Wayne County. The 2020 census, recorded a population of 3,997. Wolcott borders Lake Ontario and is part of New York State's Seaway Trail. The Town features an undulating surface with a general incline toward the lake, as well as tracts of low marshland. In 2015, Wolcott instituted its sewer connection law which combines septic inspections with sewer system connection mandates.



Chimney Bluffs State Park By: Redbridge
Source: Adobe Stock

Inspection of Existing Septic Systems

Required Inspections

- Inspection of all septic systems serving an existing residence, commercial, or industrial facility located within an established and constructed sewer district
- Change in type of use
- Within 6 months of when the sewer system servicing the property becomes available for hook-up

System Compliance

- All existing septic systems must be functional and consistent with the existing or proposed use
- Must provide for the separation of solids and grease as well as adequate percolation at minimum
- Enhanced treatment units (ETUs) require maintenance contracts that require semi-annual inspections, at a minimum

Periodic Inspection

- Residential and commercial properties must be inspected within 6 months of when the sanitary sewer system is operational
- If inspection passes, no inspection is needed for 3 years

Mandatory Connection to Sewer System

An existing septic system shall be discontinued and the property shall be connected to the sewer system whenever one of the following occur:

- Results of septic inspection indicate that the existing septic system has failed, or is failing to protect public health and safety of the environment
- Construction of a building expansion
- Change in use or intensity of commercial use
- Transfer of ownership
- Results of the inspection of an ETU indicate that replacement is necessary
- Wastewater generated at the property is collected in a holding tank
- New construction

Case Studies

NORTH ELBA, NY



Introduction

North Elba, New York is a town in Essex County, located in the heart of the Adirondack Park. Within its borders, is Lake Placid. As of the 2020 census, North Elba has a population of 7,480 residents. In 2019, North Elba enacted the Lake Placid Lake Septic System Inspection Law in order to further protect its waters.

Main Features

- Applies to parcels nearby or “proximate” to Lake Placid
- Regular inspection interval accounts for seasonal residences as well as permanent residences
- Applies standards for private septic systems, as well as additional conditions for inspection failure

Applicability

- All septic systems in the designated area and zoning classifications
- North Lake Residential District, Pre-existing Planned Unit Development, South Lake Residential District, Rural Countryside District, any other district existing or planned which is proximate to Lake Placid
- Inspections to be carried out every *5 years* for **seasonal** residences/properties
- Inspections to be carried out every *3 years* for **permanent** residences/properties

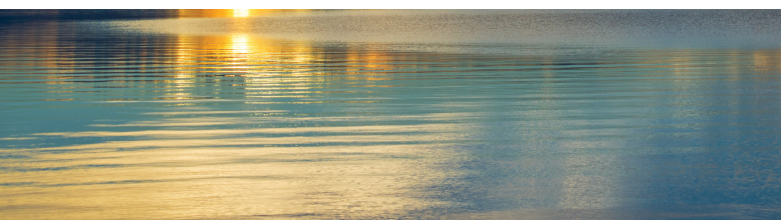
Inspection Failure

Conditions for failure:

- Lack of pretreatment vessel
- Discharge of effluent
- Direct pipe surface discharge of gray water
- Dye test results in the presence of dye in the ground surface or adjacent/downstream water body
- Backup of sewage into the structure
- Pumping required more than 4 times per year
- Septic tank is undersized or corroded
- A cesspool is present



North Elba, NY By: Randy Runtsch
Source: Adobe Stock



Lake Placid By: jkraft5
Source: Adobe Stock

This publication was supported by an agreement with Cornell University in partnership with New York Sea Grant under Prime Agreement CM04068 from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

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