



## Is Your Septic System Compliant?

Minnesotans care about the quality of their water. As proof, since 1969, there have been rules in place to protect our ground and surface waters from contamination from inadequate and malfunctioning septic systems.

The University of Minnesota's Onsite Sewage Treatment Program team has been involved in updating these rules—called codes—as research and technology have advanced and best practices have evolved. The codes are implemented by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) as well as local units of government such as counties, townships and municipalities. The most recent code updates were adopted in 2008 and are currently being implemented by local units of government across the state.

The state code became mandatory in 1996. In the years previous, some local units of government permitted septic systems that did not meet the state requirements. However, It's important to note that many septic systems designed and installed in compliance with previous state codes remain in compliance today. And while an existing septic system does not need to meet all the standards of a new system, it must meet the minimum requirements of a water tight septic tank and a specific amount of soil under the drain field to properly treat the wastewater.

Currently, codes require that systems be inspected when a permit is requested for a bedroom addition. However, homeowner activities such as requests for building permits— in particular bedroom additions— and mortgage applications, property transfers, and area surveys can also trigger local municipalities to issue a request for compliance inspection.

Local ordinances may be more restrictive than the MPCA codes and may have additional triggers which require system upgrades. The septic system inspector should also evaluate other aspects of the system to advise the property owner on steps to lengthen the life of the system. This could include the system's size, tank maintenance access, tank effluent screens, and setbacks from other natural or manmade structures. These aspects do not affect the compliance of the system but will improve its performance.

If you need a compliance inspection, you'll typically need to arrange for the inspection yourself. A licensed inspector in your area can be found by calling your local unit of government's administration office or checking on the MPCA's

website. Some municipalities have additional restrictions on their septic system codes, so you'll want to choose an inspector familiar with your area.

If you have a compliant system you'll still need to conduct periodic maintenance to assure it remains up to code. According to the state code, this means your septic systems must be evaluated at least every three years and cleaned out when sludge and scum accumulate to the point of endangering the soil treatment system. If your system is non-compliant you'll receive a notice of noncompliance and you'll be legally required to repair or replace the failing components within a given period of time.

For more information, including links to the state regulations and locating an inspector, visit the University of Minnesota Onsite Sewage Treatment Program web site at <http://septic.umn.edu>