

Level 1 Septic System Inspections During Real Estate Transactions

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Real estate transactions occur everyday. Prospective buyers purchase new or existing homes, load their belongings into moving vans, and eventually settle into the role of a homeowner. Unfortunately, for people who purchase existing homes, unforeseen expenses can appear almost immediately after moving day. One such expense is the replacement of a failed on-lot sewage disposal system. No sooner are the closing papers signed when foul-smelling septage is found in the backyard or sewage backs up in the plumbing system. In some cases, the only solution is a new installation or replacement of the existing system. This can cost the new homeowner anywhere from \$3,000 to \$15,000—in addition to frustration and inconvenience.

You can lessen the chances of the financial burden of a failed system through a Level 1 Septic System Inspection. This type of inspection provides home buyers with consistent inspection guidelines. For a fee of \$150 to \$325 (which may include pumping the septic tank), an inspection will provide you with useful information about the septic system you are buying. The inspection cost can be negotiated in the real estate closing costs.

What a Level 1 Inspection Is

A Level 1 Septic System Inspection provides homeowners or prospective buyers with information about septic system components and current operating

conditions. Inspection results are based on the experience and expertise of a knowledgeable inspector. Each inspection results in a septic system report that states:

- the type and condition of the system and its components
- potential problems or "red flags" in the system and possible need for additional testing
- list of corrective measures

The Level 1 inspection described in this fact sheet is the first step to learning about the system. Where major problems exist, a homeowner may need to have more extensive Level 2 or 3 testing done before an accurate evaluation can be made.

What a Level 1 Septic System Isn't

A Level 1 Septic System Inspection is not:

- a warranty or guarantee that the system will properly function for any period of time in the future.
- associated, certified or endorsed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or its regulatory or governing agencies.
- an assurance that the soil is adequately treating effluent or that it will continue to do so in the future.

The septic system inspection program materials are provided as educational and consumer information to improve your understanding of septic systems. This information is not an element of Pennsylvania state regulations or permits. You must contact your local Sewage

Enforcement Officer or the Department of Environmental Resources for regulatory information.

The Level 1 Inspection Process

Currently the Pennsylvania Septage Management Association (PSMA) has adopted level 1 inspection guidelines. To obtain an inspection during a real estate transaction:

1. The prospective buyer or seller requests a contingency clause in the purchase agreement that states that a final contract is dependent upon inspection of the on-lot sewage disposal system using the PSMA Inspection Instructions and Checklist.
2. A qualified, trained inspector is identified to perform the inspection. Contact PSMA to find an inspector located in your county (address provided at the end of this fact sheet).
3. The inspector reviews the system and completes the checklist. Finally, the inspector issues a Septic System Report to inform interested parties about the system.

Uses of a PSMA Level 1 Inspection

The information gained in a septic inspection provides:

1. **You** with knowledge about the type and condition of the components of the septic system you are buying, as determined by a professional who maintains septic systems.
2. **A system inspector** with information such as age of septic system, household size, maintenance records, etc. that can be used to determine the likelihood of a failed system.

3. **An independent contractor** with background information which can be used to estimate renovation or replacement costs.

Ultimately, each of these advantages helps you buy a home with an adequate, correctly maintained system that meets your family's wastewater disposal needs.

Additional Information Sources

For more information about Level 1 septic inspections, contact PSMA at the following address:

The Pennsylvania Septage
Management Association
3863 Union Deposit Road #449
Harrisburg, PA 17109

For more information about on-lot septic systems, obtain Fact Sheet SW-168, *On-lot Sewage Disposal Publications Available Through the College of Agricultural Sciences*, at the address listed below.

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For further information or for a copy of our Fact Sheet Listing contact:
Agricultural and Biological Engineering Department
246 Agricultural Engineering Building
University Park, PA 16802
Telephone: 814-865-7685
FAX Number: 814-863-1031