



FOR RELEASE:

October 14, 2014

CONTACT:

Dan Reynolds
(231) 547-7629
d.reynolds@nwhealth.org



**HEALTH
DEPARTMENT**
of Northwest Michigan

www.nwhealth.org

Health Department offers septic system advice for residents of Northern Michigan

Septic system failures can be a major inconvenience for homeowners. They can result in expensive repairs, and can threaten environmental and public health if not corrected quickly. In Northern Michigan, winter repairs can be complicated by freezing temperatures, deep snow, and load restrictions for heavy equipment. While each system has a life expectancy, proper maintenance can extend its life and provide valuable information on its operation.

Scott Kendzierski, Director of Environmental Health for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, says many septic system failures can be prevented with simple maintenance and planning. Each year, in the fall, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) encourages homeowners and communities to check up on the health of their septic systems, get tanks pumped and share septic-saving tips with everyone in the household.

“In general, septic systems should be pumped every three to five years,” Kendzierski said. “But given our large number of seasonal dwellings in Northern Michigan, system maintenance tends to be more sporadic. Homeowners may not even recall the last time their tank was pumped or checked. A home may be purchased without the new owner knowing anything about its septic system.” He explained that septic systems are designed to accommodate the expected amount of usage, and to protect both the environment and the homeowner from harmful waste. But without proper maintenance and precautions, any system can break down, potentially costing the homeowner thousands of dollars. The EPA offers SepticSmart tips for every household at www.epa.gov/septicmart.

Kendzierski said it’s equally important to know who to call for system inspection and service. “There are different types of on-site wastewater service providers in Michigan,” he explained. “Some are equipped to pump sewage from a tank; others are trained to evaluate conventional septic systems, while others are experienced with more advanced systems. Systems can range from a simple tank and drainfield to systems with pumps, alarms, cycle counters, recirculating valves, compressors, replaceable media filters and other devices.”

The Health Department routinely conducts existing system evaluations, mortgage evaluations and issues permits for new and replacement wastewater systems. The agency maintains records that can help in identifying your system type, age, location and other information. Understanding your system is the best way to establish a maintenance strategy that works, and to prevent unexpected or premature failures.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties. For more information, call (800) 432-4121 or visit www.nwhealth.org.