



Septic Education Fact Sheet for the Maple River and Stony Creek

Septic system maintenance benefits your health, home value, and local water resources like the Maple River and Stony Creek, their streams, and groundwater.

Your local partners in community health—Clinton Conservation District and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department—are finding that local waters regularly harbor unsafe levels of pathogens that primarily come from improperly functioning septic systems. This fact sheet provides information for septic system owners on human health concerns related to waterborne pathogens, practical actions that can be taken to address the pollution, and where to go for more information.

What are water tests showing?

Repeated and frequent water quality tests of the Maple River and Stony Creek systems reveal high levels of the pathogen *Escherichia coli* or *E. coli*. When *E. coli* are present, pathogens that cause diseases, such as giardia, hepatitis, or cholera, can make it unsafe to consume or enjoy our waters. While there can be many causes for the presence of *E. coli*, testing by the conservation district confirms that in our community, human waste from improperly functioning septic systems is the prominent source.

How does septic system wastewater get in the river system?

All water runs out of your house from one main drainage pipe into a septic tank. It carries away and treats waste in a buried, water-tight container where the wastewater is held long enough to allow solids to settle to the bottom (sludge) while the oil and grease float to the top (scum). The tank is designed to prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank. Only the liquid wastewater should leave the tank on its way to the drainfield. Finally, the wastewater percolates into the soil, naturally removing harmful bacteria and viruses.

If the drainfield is overloaded with too much liquid, it will flood, causing sewage to flow to the ground surface or creating backups in toilets and sinks. The sewage then reaches local waterways through groundwater or by overland flow.

How do I know if my septic system is not working properly?

If you discover any of these warning signs, call a licensed septic tank contractor immediately.

- Wastewater backing up into household drains, toilets, and/or sinks
- Puddles or saturation around the septic tank and drainfield
- A putrid stench around the septic tank and drainfield
- Dead spots or bright green, spongy grass appearing on the drainfield, even during dry weather

Save money. Save your yard.

One call could save you thousands of dollars. A regular pump-out of a well-maintained system costs a few hundred dollars every three to five years, depending on where you live, your tank's size, and whether your service provider has to locate or uncover it. Replacing a malfunctioning septic system can cost \$3,000 to \$15,000 as well as time to restore your yard and landscaping. Malfunctioning systems can drastically reduce property values, hamper the sale of your home, and even pose a legal liability.

Protect your drinking water and the local fishing hole.

A properly maintained system helps keep your family's drinking water pure and reduces the risk of contaminating community, local, and regional waters. Properly maintaining your septic system keeps Clinton County rivers and streams healthy. As water quality tests are showing, the polluted wastewater from malfunctioning septic systems harms the river, killing native plants, fish, and aquatic insects—all important elements of the local freshwater ecosystem.

Take these simple steps to maintain your septic system.

1. Inspect and pump: Every three to five years, your system should be professionally assessed to rule out any problems.
2. Repair leaks: Repair any small leaks inside the home because they can cause big problems for your system.
3. Dispose of waste properly: Only human waste and toilet paper should be flushed.
4. Care for your drainfield: Do not park or drive on the drainfield, and keep it clear of trees and roots.



Rate your septic system's risk for failing:

How old is your septic system?

- a. Five years or fewer
- b. Six to 20 years
- c. Older than 20 years

How often do you pour oils, paints, grease, etc. down the drain?

- a. Never
- b. Occasionally
- c. Often

How often do your sinks, tub, and/or shower drain slowly?

- a. Never
- b. Two to three times a year
- c. More than three times a year

How often is your tank pumped?

- a. At least every three to five years
- b. More than five years between pumping
- c. Has not been pumped/don't know

How often do vehicles or heavy equipment drive over the drainfield?

- a. Never
- b. Occasionally
- c. Often

If you answered C for three or more, then it's time for a checkup.

For more information, contact the Clinton Conservation District.



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