

MANDATORY INSPECTION PROGRAM FOR LAKESHORE ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS



Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS), including septic systems, aeration systems, seepage pits, holding tanks, etc., are used to treat wastewater from facilities where public sewers are not available. The Sanitary Code of the Chautauqua County Health District defers to Appendix 75-A Wastewater Treatment Standard –Individual Household Systems (New York State Department of Health) to determine which type of OWTS should be used on an individual property considering the:

- Type, occupancy, and size of the facility (dwelling)
- Site characteristics (soil type, groundwater depth, distance to drinking water wells and surface water, etc.)

The Program aims to protect private drinking water wells, reduce lake water contamination, and protect public health from short-circuiting OWTSs that are not adequately treating wastewater. Beginning in 2016, the Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services (CCDHHS) is required by the Sanitary Code to inspect all OWTSs along Bear, Cassadaga, Chautauqua, Erie, and Findley lakes that meet the following criteria:

- The facility/dwelling *or* OWTS components are located 250 feet or closer to a lake *AND* one of the following is true
 - The OWTS is not permitted by CCDHHS.
 - The permitted OWTS is 30 years old or older.
 - An OWTS is suspected to be in significant non-compliance with the Sanitary Code.

The Program is being implemented because public health risks related to declining lake water quality are increasing in Chautauqua County. The recent findings of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency determined that *all OWTSs within 50 feet* of the lakeshore and *40% of the OWTSs within 250 feet* of the lakeshore are short-circuiting; these systems contaminate lake water and groundwater.

To complete a Mandatory Inspection property owners will uncover OWTS components and hire a NYSDEC–licensed waste hauler to pump-out existing septic tanks, treatment units, or holding tanks in the presence of CCDHHS staff. The system will be evaluated by visual observation, dye testing, and probing to determine capacity and structural integrity.

OWTSs will be evaluated individually and placed into one of four categories, relating to the severity of risk they pose to public health. Public health risk depends largely on OWTS distance from the lake, depth to groundwater, and the manner in which an OWTS may be failing. The four categories are:

- 1. Immediate Public Health Hazard** - Effluent (outflow) is surfacing on the ground and/or readily reaching lake water. Immediate corrective action will be required.
- 2. Groundwater Hazard** - Effluent is less than 2 feet above the seasonal high groundwater table; the system is short circuiting and contaminating groundwater which flows to the lakes. Actions may be necessary to diminish nutrient contamination.
- 3. Potential Public Health Risk** - The OWTS *does not meet* Sanitary Code standards; steps to prevent a future public health hazard may be necessary or additional inspections may be required to verify that the potential risk is not increasing.
- 4. No Obvious Public Health Risk** - The OWTS *meets* Sanitary Code standards. No corrective action required.

If corrective action is required, CCDHHS staff will work with property owners to determine the best course of action for individual circumstances. A failing system may require relatively minor repairs and maintenance, individual component replacement, or complete reconstruction. Professional engineering may be required depending on the characteristics of individual properties. Permit fees for corrections may apply and will vary depending on the required correction.



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HELP KEEP CHAUTAUQUA
COUNTY SAFE & BEAUTIFUL.
THANK YOU!**

FAQs

Which areas will CCDHHS inspect first? 2017 - 2019 inspections will focus on areas of Chautauqua and Findley lakes. As public sewer options evolve the areas of focus may change. The list of properties requiring inspections will change annually as additional OWTs become older than 30 years.

How much will an inspection cost? There is *no charge* for the inspection. However, property owners are



responsible for the costs associated with uncovering the OWTs components and hiring a NYSDEC-licensed waste hauler to pump out septic tanks, treatment units, or holding tanks.

Does the property owner need to be present for the inspection? No. However, CCDHHS staff will need access to the facility to check plumbing and perform the dye test. CCDHHS recommends the property owner be present to see/understand the state of their OWTs.

I received a Mandatory Inspection letter but I have information about my OWTs. What should I do? Please make copies of any documentation regarding the construction, inspection, and maintenance of your system; send the copies with the completed survey form to CCDHHS by mail or fax with the Tax ID # (ex. 100.00-1-2.2) on every page. CCDHHS will review the information and contact you.

If public sewers are going to be installed, why are you inspecting my OWTs? Public sewers are planned for areas around Chautauqua and Findley lakes but funding has not yet been secured. Meanwhile, short circuiting systems continue to threaten lake water quality, aquatic life, and public health; *these problems cannot be ignored.*



What if I don't comply with this program?

The matter will be referred to the Board of Health for compliance.

My system is old but seems to be working. Will I have to install a new system? Systems will be evaluated individually to determine the current or potential public health risk. A functioning system, in good condition and maintained properly, may not require corrective action but may require follow-up inspections to ensure it continues to operate without risk to public health.



If my system is failing, what will I be required to do? CCDHHS staff will work with property owners to identify the best and most efficient corrections needed to eliminate public health risk.

If public sewers are planned, why should I spend money on my system now, when I'll have to pay to connect to the new public system? The need to correct a failing system depends on a number of factors:

- How and why is it failing?
- How soon will a sewer district be formed?
- Will a temporary fix be able to reduce public health risk until public sewers are available?



Failing systems will not correct themselves and public health risk will increase. Public sewers are being planned but short circuiting OWTs and public health risk cannot be ignored. Our lakes are already experiencing the negative effects of contamination; *postponing OWTs corrections will only make it more difficult to correct water quality problems in the future.*



Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) on Chautauqua and Findley Lakes.

INTERNET LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Chautauqua Co. Environmental Health (permits/maintenance) - <http://www.co.chautauqua.ny.us/266/PrivateSewage>

Appendix 75-A Wastewater Treatment Standard (NYSDOH) & the "Residential OWTs Design Handbook" - http://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/nycrr/title_10/part_75/appendix_75-a.htm

Dept. Environmental Conservation OWTs information - http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/onsitewastewater.pdf

Dept. Environmental Conservation Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) - <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/77118.html>