

What you should ask before buying a home with a septic system

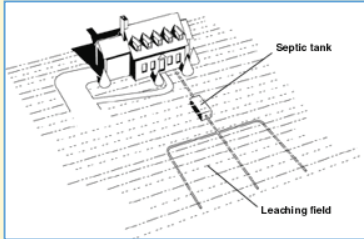
#1 How do you tell if the property has a septic system?

If you are unsure if there is a septic system on the property or not, some tell-tale signs are:

- the property has a well
- there is a waterline coming into the home, but there is no water meter
- the property's water bill has \$0.00 in sewer amount charged
- the property doesn't receive a bill from Water Environment Services or your city

#2 Do the current owners have drawings/plans of where the septic system is located?

The home should have an "as built" drawing showing where the septic system is located. You can also check the yard for lids and manhole covers. If drawings are not available, contact a septic system contractor to help you locate the system, or call Clackamas County Water Environment Services to see if they have old records on file.



US Geological Survey

503-742-4740.

You may also ask if the system was installed with a permit. If not, it may be a very old system or illegally constructed. You may be required to upgrade or replace the system in the future and you could be liable if the system fails or causes a threat to public health.

#3 Are there records of inspection and pumping of the septic system?

Check the records of past maintenance. This will help identify if potentially costly repairs will need to be made. Documentation of the system should include the following:

- Approximate age of the system
- Type of system
- Size of tank
- Type of tank material
- Condition and integrity of baffles
- Overall condition/integrity of tank
- Diagram of the location of the septic tank, distribution box, and drainfield (if possible) in relation to the house and rest of the property
- General site evaluation: any drainfield issues, ponding, odors, or other evidence of system failure
- Recommendations for any repairs needed
- Estimate of the next service date

#4 Is the system large enough and what type of yearly operation and maintenance of the septic system will be required?

Permit records usually indicate the size of the system in gallons per day and the drain field was likely based on the number of bedrooms. Every septic system has yearly maintenance costs. These costs vary depending on the system. If more people

are using the system than originally intended, maintenance costs may increase. Note that Alternative Treatment Technology Systems are required to be under a maintenance contract throughout the life of the system. Make sure you understand the costs before you buy.

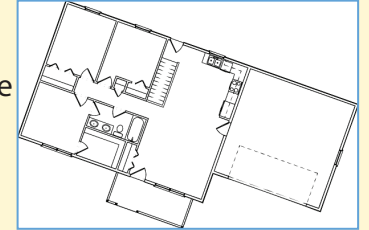
#5 Does the location of the septic system allow for future home/property improvements?

Consider future improvements you may want to make to the house or property such as decks, hardscapes, home additions, or new building on the property. Digging, planting, or the placement of hard surfaces over the drainfield of a septic system will damage or ruin the system, limiting what can be done on the property.

Additions to the house may require a larger system and or drainfield.

Note if there is a suitable area set aside for a replacement system should the current one fail—this "reserve area" cannot be built on.

If you think you are going to want make any changes to the property, check with Clackamas County Water Environment Services regarding rules and regulations.



*Don't take chances,
know before you buy!*

Why Understanding Septic Systems Is Important

Onsite wastewater treatment systems (septic systems) are the most common wastewater treatment systems in rural, unsewered areas of Clackamas County. There are over 9,000 septic systems in the Clackamas River watershed and many more in Clackamas County.

Proper, routine maintenance of septic systems plays a critical role in protecting our environment, water quality, the health of your family and the health of those who live downstream.

Failing septic systems can contaminate nearby surface and ground water and can end up being very costly to fix.

The homeowner is responsible for the operation and maintenance of their system. If the system fails, the owner pays for the repair or replacement.

So before you buy property with a septic system, understand how septic systems work and how to tell if it has been well maintained.



US Environmental Protection Agency

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For technical assistance or questions about septic system permits, call Clackamas County Water Environment Services/Soils at 503-742-4740.

For more information regarding Septic System Financial Assistance for home owners in the Clackamas River watershed, call 503-723-3510.

For more information about the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Onsite Wastewater Management (septic system) Program, call 541-686-7905.

To locate a licensed septic service professional in your area, visit DEQ at <http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/onsite/sdssearch.asp>. Make certain the contractor has been trained in inspecting existing systems (some licensed professionals only install new septic systems or pump tanks).

Learn about the rural lifestyle, visit the Clackamas County Soil and Water Conservation District online library at <http://conservationdistrict.org/> or call 503-210-6000.

5 Things You Should Ask Before Buying a Home With a Septic System



Your partners in clean water:



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

