Mechanicsburg, PA 717-766-4345
Lancaster, PA 717-898-3201
York, PA 717-764-1920
www.YourInspectionPeople.com

ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM INSPECTON

Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems commonly referred to as a septic tank system are individual wastewater treatment systems that use the soil to treat small wastewater flows, usually from individual homes where public sewers are not available. They are typically used in rural or large lot settings where centralized wastewater treatment is impractical. There are many types of septic systems in use today. While all septic systems are individually designed for each site, most septic systems are based on the same principles.

A standard Onsite Wastewater Treatment System consists of a septic tank, a distribution box and a drainfield, all connected by pipes, called conveyance lines. Your Onsite Wastewater Treatment System treats your household wastewater by temporarily holding it in the septic tank where heavy solids and lighter scum are allowed to separate from the wastewater. This separation process is known as primary treatment. The solids stored in the tank are decomposed by bacteria and later removed, along with the lighter scum, by a professional septic tank pumper. After the partially treated wastewater leaves the tank, it flows into a distribution box, which separates this flow evenly into a network of drainfield trenches. Drainage holes at the bottom of each line allow the wastewater to drain into gravel trenches for temporary storage. This effluent then slowly seeps into the subsurface soil where it is further treated and purified (secondary treatment). A properly functioning septic system does not pollute groundwater.

Testing the performance of private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems can be a very difficult procedure. The person or persons, to whom you are under contract, must be advised as to what is possible and what is impossible when offering an opinion as to the condition of the system or systems. The inspector should define what it is he or she can report "clearly" or cannot be expected to report due to the fact the system to be inspected is underground and not visible.

The method used when conducting a proper Onsite Wastewater Treatment System inspection includes both visual and destructive testing. An Onsite wastewater treatment system test should include the following items: having access to the tank's manhole cover to visually inspect the inside of the tank, rodding the absorption or leaching field checking for breakdowns in the soil, running the plumbing system throughout the house, and having the tank or tanks thoroughly pumped and cleaned. A dye test can be used if a problem is diagnosed in the system and the inspector wants to try and find its origin. The reason a dye test should be used after a problem is found is because the dye normally will not surface for days if at all. Many times dye is used in lieu of the other important tests and a false sense of security is given because the dye did not surface. The fact that dye appears does not mean the system failed either but, rather a good possibility a pipefitting is broken or leaking.

Inspecting the performance of an Onsite Wastewater Treatment System on a vacant property is hard to accomplish. Often times the property does not have any appliances available to test the water quantity going into the system. A hydraulic load test is generally recommended to be performed on vacant properties. This is an extensive and costly procedure that requires several days to complete.

Further information about private on site Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems can be obtained through the Pennsylvania Department of Protection, your local sewage enforcement officer (SEO) and Homechek, Inc.

Typical costs for an Onsite Wastewater Treatment System inspection ranges from $160-$200. Costs for pumping septic tank(s) can range from $125-$500. A hydraulic load test on an Onsite Wastewater Treatment System can typically cost between $500-$1000.