



What is a septic system?

A septic system generally consists of a septic tank, distribution box and a drainfield. Waste from the house enters the septic tank, where it separates into sludge (at the bottom), effluent (in the middle) and scum (on the top). The effluent will flow out of the tank, and into the distribution box, where it will be distributed evenly through the drainfield, to be absorbed into the ground.

Why is the septic system important in a real estate transaction?

The septic system is the most expensive system in a house. Ensuring it is functioning correctly is an important part of the homebuying process. All septic systems will need to be pumped periodically, but an evaluation of the components of the system can help in avoiding costly surprises down the road.

What is included in a basic septic inspection?

The function of all plumbing fixtures inside the home will be evaluated. Fixtures that drain slowly or odors from drains may be a sign of a malfunctioning system. Fixtures that have a steady leak may place additional load on a system, causing it to need pumped earlier or more frequently. The tank will be opened and visually examined to determine its condition. The level of the contents (sludge and scum) will be measured to determine if they are within normal ranges. The inlet and outlet baffles, if accessible, will be examined. Fluorescent dye will be introduced into the system, along with approx. 100 gallons of water, so that the movement of waste through the system can be observed. A UV light will be used to observe the movement of the dye through the system, and to look for any leaks. The property will be walked to look for signs of standing water in the distribution field, and viewed with a UV light to check for any signs of wastewater breakout. Following the inspection, a written report will be prepared detailing the findings.

It is important to note that the tank's inspection ports will need to be uncovered by the seller prior to the inspector's arrival. This should be a standard part of the sales contract.