

# When Your Septic System Fails In **MAINE OR NEW HAMPSHIRE**



Septic systems fail for many reasons. Typical signs of failure include:

- 1** Wastewater or sewage backup into the home.
- 2** Runback from the leach field when the tank is pumped.
- 3** Lush green grass over the leach field, and Undesirable odors near your septic system or inside your home.

**T**he rules for septic inspections, installations, and regulations in Maine and New Hampshire differ greatly from Massachusetts. For example, in Massachusetts a septic inspection is required whenever a property is sold, but in Maine and New Hampshire (with the exception of a few towns) it is not.

However, 90% of realtors in Maine and New Hampshire still recommend to their buyers and sellers that they perform a septic inspection when transferring a property. If the septic fails, the parties can negotiate who will remediate or replace the system. Up to 70% of buyers or sellers do have septic inspections performed. In 70-80% of the cases when septic problems are found, they can be solved by remediation. It is basically a “buyer’s beware” situation, and it is definitely to the buyer’s advantage to perform a septic inspection and know what condition the septic system is in on a property they might purchase.

Many times, a homeowner might live with the septic system failing until unpleasant odors become overwhelming or health hazards develop that get the Department of Environmental Protection involved. Unsuspecting buyers of such properties inherit unwanted problems.

It is also up to property buyers or homeowners to find and select septic professionals in Maine and New Hampshire who have gone the extra mile to gain certifications and licenses that are not necessarily required by law. Septic inspection class is recommended but strictly voluntary. There is a state form for septic inspections, but septic inspectors can also choose to use an inspection form of their own design. There are no state regulations to become septic inspectors.



# Processes in the State of Maine



Since 1926, Maine has taken responsibility for the regulation of its septic systems. The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (MCDCP) oversees all regulations pertaining to septic systems and decentralized water processing. While in some states, local governing bodies administer permits, homeowners in Maine apply through the MCDCP.

The first step for many homeowners in septic system installation is the site evaluation, or soil test. Whenever sewage, human waste, or wastewater is placed below ground in an area not previously designed to accommodate it, a site evaluation is necessary. Normally, this occurs when new properties are built, or when existing properties are used in new ways.

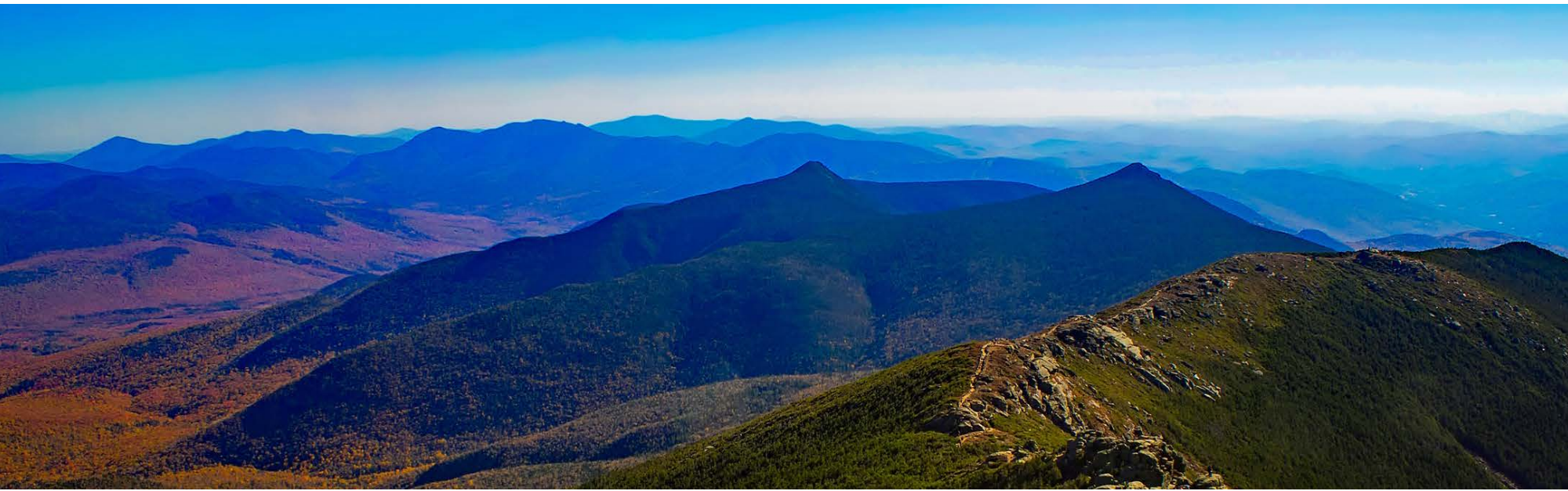
Homeowners also need site evaluations when making changes or modifications to existing systems, as well as when replacing systems. After a site evaluation has been completed, a permit is needed before beginning any work.

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the Maine State Housing Authority offer financial assistance when homeowners struggle to afford a wastewater treatment system.

It is up to property owners to find and choose septic installation professionals in Maine wisely. Currently, Maine offers a voluntary certification process for septic system installation specialists. Working with certified septic professionals is recommended.



# Processes in the State of New Hampshire



The DES has a number of useful fact sheets that address common questions about making changes to existing wastewater treatment systems. However, cities and municipalities also have the right to regulate septic systems as they affect local health issues (especially groundwater contamination). So it is important to check with your local town hall before you install or expand a New Hampshire septic system.

New Hampshire homeowners who want to design, install, replace, or repair septic systems on their own primary residences may do so without permits. However, professional septic system installers and designers must get permits from the state before they can design or install septic systems in New Hampshire.

Repair or replacement of an existing septic system requires permits as well. Septic system designers are required to pass both written and field exams before they can receive a license in New Hampshire. Septic installers are required to pass a written exam before they can receive a license. Exams are held four times a year. In addition, both installers and designers must file an application for a permit and pay a \$40 licensing fee each year. Many New Hampshire towns have their own requirements when it comes to installing a new septic system.

For example, in Salem septic designs must be approved by the town before they are forwarded for a separate approvals by the state. Permits must be purchased from the town, and town engineers must be present both during initial tests and also before any completed system is backfilled.

## Subsurface Systems Bureau

The Subsurface Systems Bureau of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES) is the office responsible for:



On-site septic inspections.



Licensure of septic system installers and designers.



Managing complaints.