

What you need to know about the Massachusetts Title V Septic Inspection Form

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Are you buying or selling your home and think Massachusetts Title V requirements are confusing? Are you replacing a failed or aging septic system and want to know what the inspector is going to look for when they show up? Do you want to learn about the inspection before starting a new septic project? These are excellent questions every person dealing with septic issues should ask. Al Rivet of All Clear Septic has provided the answers to these questions and more in this in-depth analysis of the Title V inspection forms.

The inspection form starts off with some basic information about the property being inspected, including the address, owner's information, and section A, the certification of the inspector. The form then shows the status of the system as Pass, Conditionally Pass, Failed or Needs Further Evaluation by the local approving authority. I will go into detail regarding those later. One major point not to be ignored on this first page is the large bolded section at the bottom of the page which reads as follows:

*******This report only describes conditions at the time of inspection and under the conditions of use at that time. This inspection does not address how the system will perform in the future under the same or different conditions of use.***

This is VERY important as it indicates the inspection is for the system only at the time of inspection and under the usage conditions at that time. As the person requesting the inspection you have to keep in mind that the inspection confirms the state of the system at the time inspection only.

The second page of the form continues to section B into details about if the system passes or conditionally passes. A passing system has only a comments field to be completed if the inspector wants to. The System Conditionally Passing section details all the possible ways the system can pass pending repair or replacement of specific components of the system. The list of criteria continues to page three of the document, with areas for more detail as needed. The bottom of page three goes into detail about a system that needs further evaluation by the Board of Health, citing issues of proximity of a cesspool or privy to surface water, wetlands or a drinking water supply. A cesspool is a very old septic system technology which is little more than a waste pipe from the house to a hole in the ground lined with stone or concrete block. A privy is an outhouse. Cesspools and Privy systems rarely pass Title V inspections.

The fourth page goes into more detail regarding the location of the soil absorption system, or leach field, in relation to surface water or drinking water supply. The Title V inspection process was

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created to protect wetlands, surface water and drinking water supplies which is why there is so much focus on the location of the septic systems. Ensuring the local environment is not impacted by a septic system is the primary goal of this form.

Section B.D of the certification check begins on page four, which goes into the detail of why a system may fail. This part must be filled out even if the system passes. Issues which contribute to the failure of the septic system are detailed with a yes / no checkbox next to each possibility. Again, great consideration is given to the proximity of the septic system to wells, water supplies and ground water or wetlands. If the system is failed the final item in the list directs the system owner to contact the local Board of Health to determine what is necessary to correct the failure.



Section B.E of the certification is dedicated to larger systems between 10,000 and 15,000 designed gallons per day. These are primarily commercial in nature. These few items are all related to the proximity of drinking water, well water or surface water in further effort to protect the environment and prevent contamination of the local groundwater.

Page Six of the Mass Title V inspection form examines pumping and flow records of the system. These are normally available from the local board of health as every septic pumping must be reported there. The second item on page six is of importance, as a septic system cannot be pumped less than two weeks before the inspection. The goal of the inspection is to view the system under normal usage, which is not possible in an inspection less than two weeks from the system being pumped.

Section D of the form starts at the bottom of page six and continues to page 16, showing in detail the description of the system. The first questions lay the groundwork for the rest of the form, indication how many bedrooms the property has and how much flow the system is designed for. This is to ensure the septic system is designed to properly accommodate the expected flow into the system. It will also highlight problems which may arise when additional bedrooms are added without increasing septic system capacity. Also included are items such as sink garbage grinders, having laundry draining

into the septic system and if the system is seasonal or year round. All of these items help the inspector ensure the system, if passed, is right for the house or building it is supporting.

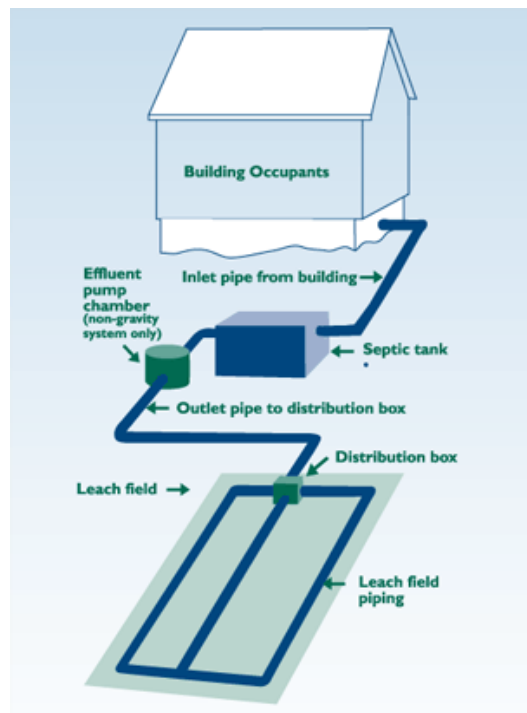
Halfway through page seven is the section for commercial or industrial applications. This section details what kind of establishment is being inspected, the designed flow, presence of grease traps or industrial waste holding tanks and meter readings is available. All this information helps the inspector ensure there is no negative environmental impact resulting from the septic system during normal use.

Page eight starts the general information section of the form. Here the inspector will collect all manner of data on your system, including the current state of the system, what kind of system has been installed, and pumping information. Pumping records are required for this form, and can be obtained at the local health department if the current owner does not have them. Further details noted are for type of system, which can be the commonly used septic tank, distribution box and soil absorption system such as a leach field or leach trench. Also listed are other types, such as a cesspool, privy (outhouse), shared system, “innovated/alternative technology” which must have supporting documentations provided, and a tight tank. A tight tank is used in situations where a soil absorption system is not feasible, such as locations near the ocean or drinking supplies. The tank is simply a sealed holding tank which is pumped out when it fills up.

Details about the construction of the building sewer and septic components are detailed thoroughly on pages nine through 14, with a picture of the system on page 15. First up is the Building sewer system, which details information about the system within the structure and how it attaches to the septic tank. This is easily identified as the large cast iron or PVC waste pipe commonly found in cellars and basements. The other main items are for the pipe’s depth in the ground, distance from private water pipe and any condition issues the system may have.

Pages nine and ten detail the septic tank’s construction, usage information, age and any other issues

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the tank may have. These pieces of information help the inspector determine if the tank is in proper working order or is failing even if the owner has not seen any issues with the system. Also on page nine is information regarding grease traps if one exists on the site, usually a business of some kind. This information is required to ensure there is no environmental impact from the septic system, should be it failing or working improperly.

Tight Tanks are addressed in depth on page 11. A Tight tank is a tank in the ground that waste flows into and is pumped out when it fills up. These are used when there can be no leaching field or soil absorption system like a leach field or trench. This happens where the septic system is close to open water, drinking water sources or other environmental areas where the possibility ground water contamination is high. Details such as design flow capacities, alarm settings and pumping records help the inspector to understand the health of the tank.

The distribution box, pump chamber and soil absorption system information is recorded on page 12 and 13. The distribution box handles the waste between the tank and soil absorption system, allowing liquids to flow freely to all areas of the leaching area if one is present. A pump chamber is present when the soils absorption area is higher than the septic tank. The pump moves liquids to a raised soils absorption area, which is easy to spot in residential systems. It is a raised mound of earth with a vent pipe that looks like a candy cane coming out of it. This vent allows air into the system which helps beneficial bacteria form and live in the system.

The soil absorption system is detailed at length on page 13. Common options listed are leaching pits, chambers, galleries, trenches and fields. Innovating / alternative system is listed at the bottom as a catch-all for some new or different method of achieving the goal of effective dispersion and treatment of liquids from the system without interfering with the local environment. Overflow cesspool is an option but this old technology is rarely approved. The next sections go through cesspools and privies or outhouses, but again, these are not used now and more rarely approved for usage.

Page 15 is a drawing of the septic system as inspected. This can either be hand draw in the space provided or attached as a separate document. This drawing is to include not only the septic system as it currently exists on the property with all parts identified, but it is also to include the nearest building and measurements from that building to the various parts of the system so it is easily found should excavation work be needed. It should also show any nearby wells and where public water enters the building if it does.

The final page of data collection is a detailed analysis of the site upon which the septic system has been built. It ask for items such as slope, presence of surface water, cellars and shallow wells. Further details regarding depth to high ground water mark and how that mark was found is required. This detail must include a description of how this was found, furthering the inspection form's drive to ensure the local environment is left unpolluted after the system is passed or repaired / replaced.

The inspection form wraps up with a final checklist which is required to be completed. It ensures the inspector has completed every section of the form, including sections which are of greater importance such as the groundwater and sketch of the system sections. Upon completion of the form, the inspector will pass, conditionally pass, fail or require further evaluation of the system. It will be provided to the health department for evaluation and actions as dictated by them.



If you as the owner of a system need to have this type of inspection performed, call All Clear Septic & Wastewater Services for prompt and professional service. All Clear Septic and Wastewater is certified to provide inspection services in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. We have earned a solid reputation within the community for providing honest and thorough inspections. We have even been called upon to provide a second opinion or a confidential voluntary assessment for the homebuyer. When you need help with your septic system or want your new home's septic inspected, contact All Clear Septic & Wastewater Services at 508-763-4431 or info@allclearseptic.com!

You can download and review the Massachusetts Title V Inspection form here:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/water/approvals/year-thru-alpha/t-thru-v/t5insp.pdf>

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