Fourth, the system's leachfield is located and an inspection of the field and its perimeter is conducted to determine if it is functioning properly.

Although not required to determine a system malfunction, minor excavation of an area of the leachfield can be used to determine liquid levels in the field. This may provide some indication as to potential malfunction in the future.

Finally the inspector reports on the status of the system. This provides information on whether the system needs replacement or repair.

Who Can Do the Inspections?

The Maine Department of Human Services, Division of Health Engineering (DHE) administers a voluntary program to train and certify septic system inspectors. People throughout the state have been certified by DHE. Chances are there is an inspector near you. You can obtain a list of inspectors by calling DHE at: (207) 287-5672, TTY (207) 287-2070, or you can access the list on their web site at: http//www.maine.gov/dhs/eng/plumb/system_inspections.htm

Septic System Inspection:

Protect your investment by minimizing the risk of costly system replacement or repair

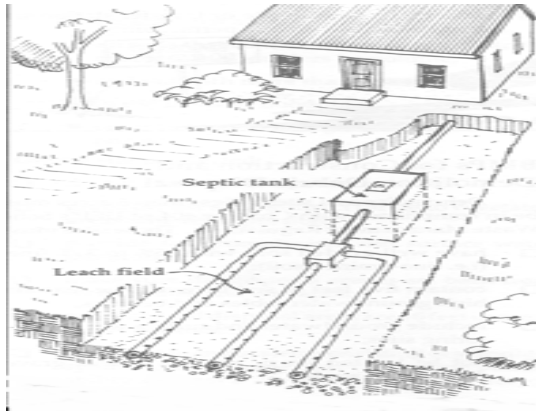# A Guide for Lending Institutions, Realtors and Prospective Home Buyers

Why Should You Request a Septic System Inspection?

Purchase and financing of a home is the largest investment most people will ever make. To help insure that this investment is protected from the unexpected cost of the replacement or repair of a septic system, it is important that the system be inspected by a trained septic system inspector. Replacement of a system can cost $12,000 or more. Such an expense for a new homeowner may be substantial. Once a malfunctioning system is detected by the local plumbing inspector it usually must be replaced immediately, since it is a violation of the Maine Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules and is a health hazard that can potentially contaminate nearby wells. This could lead to conflict between the homeowner, the realtor, and the seller, and could be enough to affect the homeowner's ability to meet other financial obligations.

For your protection it is important to determine if a system is malfunctioning prior to purchase. A new, well designed system can last 25 years or more, if properly maintained. A system that has not been maintained is a potential time bomb. Without an inspection it is impossible to know what is the condition of the system. The Departments of Human Services and Environmental Protection recommend that a system be inspected prior to any sale of the property.

What Does a Septic System Consist of?

A septic system is an underground treatment system that takes care of sanitary wastes from a home or business. It generally consists of a septic tank, usually made of steel or concrete and a leachfield. The leachfield can be a rock bed, chambers or other type of design. The tank traps solids and the leachfield treats and disposes of liquids through infiltration into the ground.

What does Inspection of a Septic System Involve?

An inspection of a septic system involves several steps. First, a record search is conducted to determine age, design and location of the system. System records are usually found at the municipal office or at the Department of Human Services' Division of Health Engineering office in Augusta.

Second, an inspection of the internal plumbing of the home is completed to ensure that all plumbing is properly connected to the system.

Third, an inspection of the septic tank is conducted to determine the solids level and to insure that the tank is functioning as designed. This requires some minor excavation to locate and open the tank cover.