

# **Septic System Re-Inspection Program within the Municipality Of Brockton**

## **Introduction:**

The Ontario Building Code Act regulates the construction, operation and maintenance of a site septic system. The effect of operation and maintenance of septic systems if done improperly, however, can extend beyond the backyard and affect public health and the environment. In turn this can negatively affect property values.

## **Background:**

The Municipality of Brockton retained French Planning Services Inc. to study Lake Rosalind and Marl Lake. One recommendation from the French Report was to establish a Septic Re-Inspection Program to inventory and monitor all septic systems within the watershed to ensure they are functioning correctly.

The Municipality in co-operation with the Lake Rosalind Property Association and the Marl Lake Property Association are supportive of this initiative as it will ultimately contribute to cleaner and healthier lakes.

The Building Code Act gives municipalities the authority to issue permits for septic systems, most septic systems eight (8) years of age or newer and installed by permit have a Certificate of Approval and Use Permit issued under the Environmental Protection Act, administered by local Health Units.

## **Program Administration – This is how the program will work:**

- Communication with public – letter to property owners about the program;
- Municipality will review property septic records-maintenance schedule, pumping, etc-to be supplies by property owner;
- The property owner will supply a diagram of the property marking location of septic and well, bodies of water, building and clearances (this can be a sketch);
- The inspector will record:
  - Name
  - Address
  - Property legal description
  - Class of sewage system i.e. leaching bed, holding tank
  - Year of construction
- Inspector will undertake site observations if necessary;
- Letter to home owner detailing results of inspection i.e. system is in need of remedial action and action required, or that there is no indication from the visual inspection of an unsafe system.
- When there is no indication of an unsafe sewage system, the property owner will be provided with a letter indicating that on the date that a visual surface inspection of the sewage system was conducted, and there was no indication of an unsafe condition;

- **When there is indication of an unsafe sewage system, the municipality will contact the property owner and work with the owner to establish a reasonable schedule to address the deficiencies.**
- **If the owner does not take reasonable action to remedy the deficiencies, they may be issued an Order to Remedy an Unsafe Building.**
- There are time, cost and liability limitations to the scope of a septic re-inspection program. A visual re-inspection of an on-site sewage system is perhaps the most viable for a program. The more intrusive inspection techniques i.e. dye testing, opening up of septic system would require a property owner always be on site and agree their system undergo the testing. This form of testing is more expensive then the visual and requires property owner approvals unless deficiencies are found, which could result in an unsafe order.

Most septic systems are buried (hidden) and many deficiencies may not show themselves during a visual inspection. The inspection is by no means a guarantee by the municipality that a system is free from deficiencies once the inspection has been completed.

### **Deficiencies for Sewage System Classes**

**The following are some examples of possible problems with septic systems:**

#### **Class 1 (Privy - Outhouse)**

- Absence of fill around the base of the privy;
- Inadequate soil depth.

#### **Class 2 (Greywater – No solids from human waste)**

- No evidence of a grey water pit; pipe on surface of ground;
- Absence of fill around base of existing pit
- Inadequate cover.

#### **Class 4 (Septic System) most common at Lakes**

- No existing system evident; pipes on surface of ground or slightly buried;
- Old tanks in need of replacement i.e. some constructed of wood or steel;
- No indication of a leaching bed; outlet pipe from ground extending into/onto ground;
- Leaching bed overgrown with long grass bed area, wet and spongy, in need of replacement;
- Tree planted on top of leaching bed or in area of bed.

**Program Structure:**

Establish risk levels associated with existing systems:

High Risk

- Systems 20 years and older will be inspected first – these will be further divided into two sub groups – systems with Health Unit Use Permits and systems without documentation

Moderate Risk

- Systems from 8 years to 19 years

Low Risk

- Systems less than 7 years will not receive an inspection unless property owner requests one
- Septic systems that require a maintenance contract will be required to produce a copy of contract ex; Aquarobic, Norweco, Waterloo Biofilter and all hold tanks.

**Remedies for Failed Systems:**

Any system found to be “unsafe” the inspector will provide the property owner with information on how to bring the system back into compliance with the Ontario Building Code. The property owner will be asked to find a licenced septic system installer to repair or replace system if the property owner is unable to complete this work in a mutually agreed upon time frame the municipality has the authority to complete the repair or replacement of the system and place cost of project onto property owners taxes.

**Conclusion:**

There are many benefits from the implementation of a septic re-inspection program. These benefits include a raised awareness among property owners as to septic system operation and maintenance issues, the identification of properties with older, potentially failed or failing systems so that corrective action can be undertaken and a general improvement in the natural environment and public health.