

DES Septage Management for Municipalities Script

NH is one of the fastest growing states in the country. And as the population increases we see more and more houses and housing facilities being constructed. This continual growth places an enormous burden on the infrastructure of local municipalities.

Many new developments are not connected to municipal sewer systems but, instead, use their own form of de-centralized wastewater treatment, also known as septic systems.

Nearly 60% of existing and 80% of all new homes in NH utilize septic systems, and the EPA estimates that about 25% of all domestic wastewater nationwide is treated through this form of wastewater treatment. That's about 4 billion gallons of wastewater every day!

Back in 1955, the NH legislature recognized that municipalities had to provide septage disposal capacity for their residents. So they passed a law under the public health statutes which made it a requirement for all municipalities to adhere too.

Remote lagoon facilities were utilized by septage haulers for the disposal of septic waste for many years, however, these types of facilities are now under pressure from development to close, or have closed due to odor and other concerns. This reduces the disposal options available for septage, and increases the need for municipalities to assure adequate disposal for their residents, in compliance with the law.

Let's take a moment and look at what the law states:

"Each municipality shall either provide, or assure access to, a department of environmental services approved septage facility or a department approved alternative option for its residents." The law, under water protection statutes, makes it quite clear that the responsibility for dealing with the septage rests with the municipality. This requirement has been on the books for approximately 50 years. The second part of the law was added recently:

II. For the purposes of paragraph I, "provide, or assure access to" shall mean a written agreement with a recipient facility, or department approved alternative option, indicating that the recipient facility agrees to accept septage generated in that municipality. The municipality shall consider providing sufficient annual capacity equal to the number of households with septic multiplied by the average septic tank capacity of 1, 000 gallons divided by the average septage pumpout frequency of 5 years.

Rest assured, there are several options your municipalities have to attain compliance with the law.

A municipality can provide disposal capacity through operating its own dedicated septage facility, or accepting septage at its centralized treatment plant. The DES can assist the municipality in developing its own dedicated septage facility or upgrading its WWTP to accept septage.

To assist municipalities in attaining compliance the DES administers a grant program that provides monies to municipalities to cover up to 50% of eligible costs to increase septage disposal capacity at a new or existing facility.

Your municipality can also enter into a contract with another municipal disposal facility or an approved private facility. The important part of such a contract is to assure access to specific capacity, as opposed to an open invitation. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services can assist your municipality in developing and implementing these types of contracts.

Assuring adequate disposal for public health translates to economical disposal. This means homeowners will be more likely to pump their tanks on a regular basis, greatly reducing the possibility of system failures. System failures can lead to unsanitary conditions both inside the home and to the property itself. Outside system failures can affect other neighbors, water bodies and recreational facilities within your municipality.

Proper understanding of your municipality's septage disposal responsibility helps to assure access to affordable septage disposal for your residents. Affordable septage disposal is a key element to proper maintenance of septic systems and helps us all to protect the natural water resources we're blessed with here in New Hampshire. It takes everyone of us to make sure we do our part to assure this life giving resource stays clean and healthy for generations to come.