

Time-of-Sale Septic System Inspections Frequently Asked Questions

How does the time of sale inspection program work?

When a home with a septic system and /or private well is sold or transferred, the seller or his agent arranges to have the septic system and well inspected. These arrangements are made with the county sanitarian or environmental health office. Normally a septic pumper or contractor is hired to uncover the septic tank and pump it out. The septic tank is then inspected as is the secondary treatment system (usually a leach field or sand filter). If the system appears to be functioning and is not illegally discharging untreated wastewater to the surface it should pass the inspection. A system installed in the past that may not meet today's requirements can still pass the inspection if it is not illegally discharging. If the septic system is illegally discharging (failing or no secondary treatment), repair would be required.

Will this time-of-sale requirement hold up the sale of the property?

If the inspection is scheduled when the property is listed or before an offer is made there should be no delay. If sewer or well work is required, the obligation is assigned to the property and the seller or buyer can have the work done within a "reasonable period of time." The work does not have to be done before the closing.

How do I find my septic tank if I don't know where it is?

Septic tank pumpers and county sanitarians have the tools and knowledge to help you find your septic tank.

Will they dig up the yard?

Once the tank is located it will be uncovered. This is usually a small excavation and should be no more than a 3' x 5' hole. If there is concern about the system, some additional excavation may be required such as to locate the distribution box to see if it has plugged.

How will they uncover my tank if the ground is frozen?

Usually the tank can be uncovered unless there is a considerable amount of frost. If there is too much frost or snow to complete the inspection, an agreement between buyer and seller can be made to have the inspection done at a later date. This agreement also stipulates who will be responsible for any updates and establishes an escrow account if necessary.

How will my county sanitarian keep up with the additional workload?

The inspection fees will generate additional income that will allow the county to hire additional staff. There is also the possibility of contracting with properly trained third party inspectors to do these inspections and report to the county.

How will inspection consistency be maintained?

The DNR will add language to existing septic system rules to outline the inspection procedure statewide. The Department will also offer training on how to properly carry out these inspections.

Iowa Counties with Mandatory Time-of-Transfer Septic Inspection Ordinances

<u>County</u>	<u>County Population</u>	<u>County Seat</u>	<u>Ordinance Adopted</u>
Story	45,000	Nevada	1985
Jasper	32,000	Newton	1985
Poweshiek	19,000	Montezuma	1986
Shelby	13,000	Harlan	1991
Carroll	21,000	Carroll	1993
Benton	25,000	Vinton	1998
Page	17,000	Clarinda	1999
Mahaska	22,000	Oskaloosa	1999
Bremer	23,000	Waverly	2000
Muscatine	41,000	Muscatine	2000
Fremont	8,000	Sidney	2001
Montgomery	12,000	Red Oak	2001
Boone	26,000	Boone	2002
Dallas	40,000	Adel	2002
Tama	18,000	Toledo	2002
Harrison	16,000	Logan	2002
Mills	15,000	Glenwood	2003
Madison	15,000	Winterset	2004
Cherokee	13,000	Cherokee	2005
Marion	26,000	Knoxville	2005
Jefferson	16,000	Fairfield	2005
<u>TOTAL: 21 Counties</u>			