

Malfunctioning Private Sewage Disposal System



A private sewage disposal system (PSDS) is malfunctioning when a mechanical device is inoperable, or a tank or pipe is no longer water-tight, or when sewage is backing up into a structure or onto the ground surface. Malfunctioning PSDSs are a public health issue because exposure to sewage can cause people to become ill. A malfunctioning PSDS is a violation of the McHenry County Public Health Ordinance.

Malfunctioning PSDSs should be reported to the Division of Environmental Health.

- Department staff conducts an onsite inspection and confirms the site conditions.
- The property owner is notified in writing of the violation and the steps that need to be taken to achieve compliance.
- Department staff monitors the progress of corrective action until compliance is achieved.
- The Department's goal is to work with the property owner and to obtain voluntary compliance. However, formal enforcement may be necessary in cases where timely progress toward compliance is not made, or when there is an imminent public health risk (sewage on the ground repetitively, sewage leaving the property,

malfunctioning system serving a non-residential structure, etc).

Signs of a malfunctioning private sewage disposal system:

- Ponding liquid on the ground surface, often smells of sewage.
- A back up of sewage into the structure.
- Saturated or muddy area over the seepage area.
- Overflow of sewage at a PSDS component.
- Sewage levels in tanks or treatment devices that are above the ceiling of the unit.
- Alarms indicating a failure of a mechanical device such as a pump.

Owner responsibilities when a PSDS failure is identified:

- Know where your PSDS is located and what types of components and seepage device make up your PSDS.
- Maintain the PSDS to prevent immediate public health concerns such as sewage on the ground surface or backing up into the structure. This usually requires pumping the PSDS by a licensed and permitted septic system pumping contractor. A list of pumping contractors, permitted to work in McHenry County, is available at MCDH.info.
- Have the PSDS evaluated by a qualified professional to determine the cause of the malfunction, and what corrective action is required.
- Obtain a permit from the McHenry County Department of Health to repair or replace the malfunctioning PSDS. No permit is required for very minor repairs (broken vent pipe, replace solid piping, pump or tank lid, etc.) completed by a licensed contractor.

- Have the repair or replacement completed by a licensed private sewage disposal system installation contractor.
- Facilitate a Department of Health inspection of the construction prior to backfilling.
- Ensure that any items on the inspection notice are addressed quickly so that the work can be approved, and the permit file can be closed.

Septic system designers:

In McHenry County, septic system designs can be completed by registered professional engineers, licensed private sewage disposal installation contractors and licensed environmental health practitioners. A list of designers is available on the Department's website at MCDH.info.

Historical permit records:

Historical PSDS and water well permit records are available on the McHenry County website. The Department of Planning & Development maintains records of systems permitted prior to February 1, 2003. The Department of Health maintains records of systems permitted on February 1, 2003, or later. If records cannot be located online, a Freedom of Information Act Request can be submitted.



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