

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- More than 2.6 million Michigan citizens use water from private drinking water wells, and over 1.2 million Michigan homes have onsite sewage systems. Approximately 40,000 homes in Washtenaw County are served by these systems.
- Onsite wastewater disposal systems have a limited life expectancy, which can be dramatically shortened with improper care. Onsite water supply systems can also degrade and become compromised over time.
- Washtenaw County enacted a regulation 15 years ago to require these systems to be inspected and approved before a home could be sold, ensuring the home had a safe and effective water supply and sewage disposal system.

Time of Sale Regulation - 15 years later

In areas where municipal water and sewer services are not available, homeowners must rely on private well and sewage systems to meet their needs. Because of this, the Board of Commissioners adopted the Time of Sale Regulation, which went into effect January 1, 2000. This regulation requires the inspection and approval of private wells and sewage systems before residential property changes ownership.



Failing sewage system

Under this regulation, only homes serviced by an onsite well and/or septic system must be inspected (some exemptions, such as transfer from a spouse, apply). Inspections are conducted by individuals who have been trained and certified by Environmental Health staff. A standardized inspection procedure is used and reports are submitted on a standardized form. Inspection reports are then submitted to Environmental Health for review.



Unsanitary well pit

The purpose of this program is to ensure that homes have a safe and adequate supply of drinking water and a functional wastewater disposal system. The regulation clearly states that it is not intended to bring all systems up to current construction standards. Only those that are failing or in substantial non-conformance require corrective action.

Environmental Health considers repairs under the concept of “maximum feasible compliance,” which involves finding a solution that brings a system as close to current codes as site conditions will allow.

Since this regulation was adopted 15 years ago, it has proven incredibly successful and has served as a model code to other jurisdictions locally and nationally. Through the program, over 12,500 residential water supply and wastewater disposal systems in Washtenaw County have been inspected. The program has had a direct impact on public health and the environment by ensuring:

- Replacement of unsanitary water supply systems for over 450 homes
- Replacement of over 550 failing or malfunctioning sewage systems
- Elimination of over 400 potential groundwater contamination threats in the form of unplugged abandoned wells

What is WCPH doing to address this issue?

We have seen the program grow to an all-time high of 1,053 reports in 2014. Approximately 25% of these failed inspection standards and required corrections. The Environmental Health Division:

- Hosts trainings, administers examinations and certifies inspectors each year. There are currently 36 certified Time of Sale inspectors.
- Reviews inspection reports and determines compliance with requirements for water supply and sewage disposal systems.
- Ensures corrections are made, or ensures that escrow is established during property transfer for corrections to be made in the near future.

For more information:

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