



*mi*Ottawa Department of  
Public Health

# ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

## Home Owner's Guide





Image courtesy of Royce Hansman

A healthy home plays a **VITAL** role in building COMMUNITIES where people live, work and play.

# FAMILY

Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) helps home owners and their families live better, longer, and healthier lives. OCDPH works diligently to assure the food you eat is safe, the water you drink is clean and that you are protected from preventable diseases. Proper functioning wastewater dispersal and water supply systems are essential to protect public health. When people are healthy, they can live meaningful and satisfying lives, doing the things that they enjoy.

# HEALTH

# Matters

## What is public health?

The role of Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) is to protect our community from health threats. Public health is the science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the coordinated efforts of organizations, communities and individuals. Overall, public health is concerned with protecting the health of populations. These populations can range from a small local neighborhood, to a world-wide scale when addressing a pandemic or environmental threat.

## Public Health for Home Owners



Image courtesy of Ricardo Simões

## Real Estate Transfer Evaluation Program



## Transition can be challenging for families

Ottawa County Department of Public Health wants to help your transition go as smooth as possible. The Real Estate Transfer Evaluation Program was designed to protect the buyer, seller, seller's agent and the community. Sewage from a failed wastewater dispersal system can flow into back yards, wetlands, or a nearby creek. A damaged water supply system can contaminate the water serving many homes. Buyers will not seek out a neighborhood where potential health hazards exist, due to sewage overflow or contaminated water. Properly maintained and evaluated waste water dispersal and water supply systems will help ensure the health and value of our communities.

The Real Estate Transfer Evaluation Program was amended to the Ottawa County Environmental Health Code, on June 1, 1984. By law, a mandatory evaluation is required prior to the sale or transfer of ownership of any home or business served by an on-site water supply

system or wastewater dispersal system. At the time of closing, the seller is required to provide the buyer with a copy of the evaluation report. Prior to receiving the report, often, the buyer is unaware of problems and the need for correction or the replacement of a system. Ottawa County Environmental Health does not prevent closing on a property with a standing correction order nor specifies which party (buyer or seller) is responsible for the costs. The report provides the buyer with information to make purchasing decisions. The requirement of the evaluation and disclosure to the buyer also provides protection from liability for the seller and the seller's agent.

# Submit an Application



## Free online processing

[www.miOttawa.org/HealthSuite](http://www.miOttawa.org/HealthSuite)  
(with appropriate fee(s) paid via credit card)



## Download form

[www.miOttawa.org/EHforms](http://www.miOttawa.org/EHforms)  
Fax to (616) 393-5643



## Visit location

Holland  
12251 James St.

Hudsonville  
3100 Port Sheldon Rd.

Grand Haven  
16920 Ferris St.

## More information

(616) 393-5645 or [environmentalhealth@miottawa.org](mailto:environmentalhealth@miottawa.org)  
[www.miOttawa.org/landevaluation](http://www.miOttawa.org/landevaluation)

# Processing Time

The Ottawa County Department of Public Health, Environmental Health staff acknowledges the importance of completing your application in a timely manner. When your evaluation results are available, we will provide the report as quickly as possible. Please be advised, our field technicians cover multiple townships throughout the County. Our technicians process multiple applications throughout the day, focusing on field evaluations and paperwork to provide prompt service. If you need to call with questions, we will make it a priority to return your call in a timely manner. Leaving repeated messages will not expedite the application process, only increase processing time. We give every effort to return your message within 72 hours. If leaving a message is necessary, please provide the parcel number so we may efficiently check the status. We thank you for your patience and look forward to providing your evaluation results. Expected processing time may take up to 3 to 4 weeks, depending on the volume of applications received.

# How to Read an Evaluation Report



Image courtesy of Royce Hansman

The Real Estate Transfer Evaluation Report educates buyers on the condition of the water supply system and/or the wastewater dispersal system. The report discloses potential issues to the home buyer as well as identifies and corrects environmental and public health hazards.

The Michigan Water Well Construction and Pump Installation Code and the Ottawa County Environmental Health Requirements for Construction of Wastewater Dispersal Systems establish the minimum construction standards against which the system is evaluated. Deficiencies in construction can increase the risk of contamination, either to the groundwater (through improper treatment of septic waste) or drinking water (through well construction deficiencies). If deficiencies have been found, then they are listed on the report.

While every effort has been made by Ottawa County Department of Public Health to provide a careful disclosure of available facts and observations, the report does not signify “approval” or “non-approval” and does not constitute a guarantee concerning future performance. Systems are rated, not given an approval nor grandfathered. Reports are valid for six months.

**Acceptable - Conformance:** System has been determined to conform to current standards. System may continue to be utilized.

**Acceptable - Substantial Conformance:** System has deficiencies which prevent it from conforming to current standards. However, it was installed prior to the current standards and was functioning properly at the time of the inspection. System may continue to be utilized.

## Rating of Systems

**Unacceptable - Non-Conformance/Failure:** System presents a health hazard and continued use is not permitted. Correction required.

**Undetermined:** An adequate assessment of the condition of the system could not be made.

## Recommended Replacement VS Required Replacement

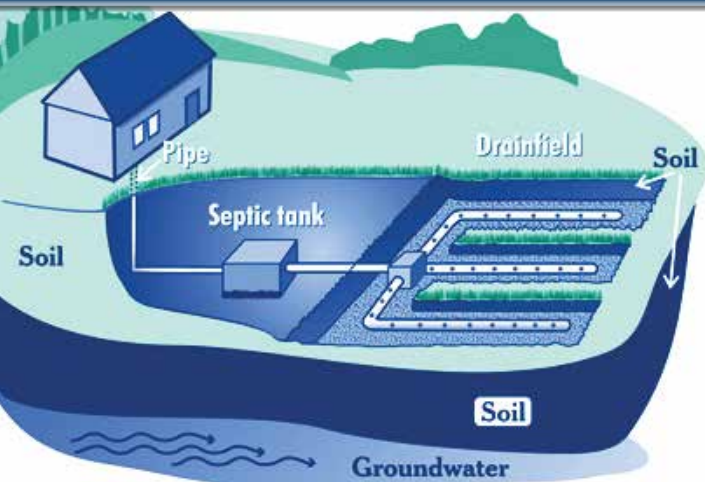
Depending on the type and number of deficiencies found a recommendation to replace or requirement to replace the system may occur. **If the deficiencies are not creating a public health hazard, then a recommendation to replace the system may be listed on the report.** A recommendation does not require replacement, and the buyer can choose to utilize the existing system until failure. This recommendation notifies the buyer that the system does not meet code, and is at a higher risk of presenting a health hazard. However, it is the buyer's choice to replace the system or to continue to utilize the existing system, until such a time that failure occurs.



**If the system is presenting a public health hazard, then the system is required to be replaced.** The Real Estate Transfer Evaluation Report will clearly state under the conclusions: “The system presents a public health hazard and shall be corrected”. A correction order will be attached to the report that outlines what is required, and the timeline for completion. When a correction order is issued, it does not mean the sale of the home cannot be completed. It is a condition that must be fixed prior to occupancy.



# Wastewater Dispersal System Evaluation



Permits are required for the installation of all new and repair on-site wastewater dispersal systems.

When conducting an evaluation of the wastewater dispersal system the Environmental Health Specialist will complete the following:

- **Record Review**—Review of permits, finals, previous real estate evaluations, and other documentation which allows for a general overview of the property and any previous issues. Previous issues are investigated during the site visit.
- **Site Inspection**—Measurement of isolation distances, visual evaluation of the wastewater disposal area, auger boring into the absorption area and/or adjacent soils, probing for septic tank(s) and drainage area location, visual inspection of plumbing to verify where water softener and footing drain discharge.

The evaluation of the wastewater dispersal system examines the construction of the system. Systems that are found to be a potential health hazard, potentially causing harm to the community (discharging to surface, illicit connection, or installation in the water table), are required to be replaced. Systems that cannot be located after significant investigation may be required to be replaced, it is the responsibility of the buyer or seller to locate the system and contact this office for a re-evaluation.

For more information on system care, visit [www.miottawa.org/landevaluation](http://www.miottawa.org/landevaluation) or [www.epa.gov/owm/septic](http://www.epa.gov/owm/septic)



## Wastewater Dispersal System Care

A typical septic system has four main components: a pipe from the home, a septic tank, a drain field, and the soil. Microbes in the soil digest or remove most contaminants from wastewater before it eventually reaches groundwater.



To prevent buildup, sludge and floating scum need to be removed through periodic pumping of the septic tank. Regular inspections and pumping are the best and cheapest way to keep your septic system in good working order.

## Signs of Failure

- Bad odors around the drain field area.
- Wet spots with excessively lush green grass.
- Standing water in the drain field area.
- Plumbing or septic tank back-ups.
- Slow draining fixtures.
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing system.

## Dos

- Check if your system will handle garbage disposal waste, additives, or commercial cleaners.
- Use water efficiently to avoid system overload.
- Keep records of repairs, pumpings, inspections, and permits issued.
- Learn the location of your septic system.
- Have your septic system inspected and pumped.
- Plant only grass over and near your septic system.

## Don'ts

- Don't put non-biodegradable into your system.
- Don't use caustic drain openers for a clogged drain.
- Don't drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system.

## 5 TIPS

1. Regularly inspect your system and pump your tank as necessary.
2. Use water efficiently.
3. Don't dispose of household hazardous wastes or prescription medication in sinks or toilets.
4. Care for your drain field.
5. Septic tank additives are not necessary for proper system function.

**Save Money!**  
**Stay Healthy!**  
**Protect the Environment!**

[www.miOttawa.org/Eco](http://www.miOttawa.org/Eco)

**Recycle • Household  
Hazardous Waste •  
Medication Disposal**

# Water Supply System Evaluation



Permits are required for the installation of all new and repair on-site water well systems.

When conducting an evaluation of the water supply system the Environmental Health Specialist will complete the following:

- **Record Review**—Review of well logs, permits, finals, and other documentation which allows for a general overview of the property and any previous issues. Previous issues are investigated during the site visit.
- **Site Inspection**—Measurement of well isolation distances, visual inspection of well components and water distribution system, sampling of water supply for coliform bacteria and nitrates.

The evaluation of the water supply considers both water quality and well construction. However, the main emphasis is on well construction. The construction of the well is a better indicator of potential for risk and water contamination. If the well does not meet code, the reasons are listed on the report. Depending on the number and type of construction deficiencies found, a new well may be recommended or required. The risk presented by the well is not determined by water quality results. It is important to understand that a water sample is a very small part of the total water supply and not a protective barrier.

For more information on system care, visit [www.miottawa.org/landevaluation](http://www.miottawa.org/landevaluation) or [www.epa.gov/safewater](http://www.epa.gov/safewater)

## Water Supply System Care

Your private water well is your personal source for drinking water. It also provides water for cooking, bathing, laundry, and gardening. Today's water wells are designed and constructed to provide decades of reliable service. They are installed by State licensed well drillers, in accordance with stringent standards in the State well code. Having a private well gives you a degree of independence. You will never be without water because of a water main break or worry about water bills. However, your well will not have treatment chemicals (such as chlorine or fluoride) automatically added to your drinking water, unless you choose to install a water treatment device. The electrical cost to run the water pump and any water treatment devices will be minimal.



Along with the independence that a private water supply provides, so comes responsibility. Since your water does not come from a city, village, or township public water supply, no one automatically checks your water quality. Local power outages can leave you without water. You are responsible for maintenance and operation of your water system and monitoring of water quality. In addition, property owners are responsible for plugging abandoned water wells. Wells that are not operational or taken out of service need to be sealed to avoid potential health and safety hazards from people falling into wells or drinking contaminated water.

## Protect your Water

Hire a State licensed well driller for any new well construction or modification.

Install a locking well cap or sanitary seal to prevent unauthorized use of, or entry into, the well.

Do not mix or use pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides, degreasers, fuels, and other pollutants near the well.

Check the visible parts of your system for problems, such as cracking or corrosion, broken or missing well cap, settling and cracking of surface seals.

Have the well tested once a year for coliform bacteria, nitrates, and other contaminants.

Do not drink or wash from a flooded well to avoid becoming sick.

# Water Quality Testing



The drinking water that is supplied to our homes comes from either surface water or ground water. Surface water is collected on the ground, in a stream, river, lake, reservoir, or ocean. Ground water is obtained by drilling wells and is located below the ground surface in pores and spaces within rocks. A private well uses ground water as its water source. Owners of private wells and other individual water systems are responsible for ensuring that their water is safe from contaminants. You should have your well tested once each year for total coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels.

A water sample is a very small part of the total water supply and not a protective barrier. It is a “snapshot in time” and one non-detect result does not necessarily indicate that the water supply is in compliance or free of contaminants. The Ottawa County Department of Public Health provides water testing and can also provide you with a list of State-certified laboratories that test for a variety of water quality indicators and contaminants.

## Common Sources of Contaminants

- Natural chemicals and minerals (arsenic, radon, or uranium)
- Local land use practices (fertilizers, pesticides, livestock, animal feeding operations, and bio-solids application)
- Manufacturing processes
- Sewer overflows
- Nearby malfunctioning wastewater treatment or septic systems

## Potential Problems

- If there are known problems with well water in your area.
- If you've experienced problems near your well (flooding, land disturbances, and nearby waste disposal sites).
- If you replace or repair any part of your well system and you notice a significant change in water quality (taste, color, or odor).

# Public Health Services

Home Owners Families Communities

- Immunizations
- Family Planning
- Recycling
- Medication Disposal
- Household Hazardous Waste Disposal
- Sharps Disposal Program
- Emergency Preparedness Resources
- Beach Water Testing
- Community Health Services
- . . . . and much more!

## Visit

[www.miOttawa.org/landevaluation](http://www.miOttawa.org/landevaluation)

## Call

(616) 393-5645 or (616) 396-5266

## Email

[environmentalhealth@miottawa.org](mailto:environmentalhealth@miottawa.org)

## CONTACT US

### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Addresses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors that may affect human health, by preventing diseases and creating health supportive environments.

Image courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



*mi*Ottawa Department of  
**Public Health**

Our Vision **HEALTHY PEOPLE**

# Home Service Log

## Wastewater Dispersal System

### Tank Pumped

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Pumper

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

## Water Supply System

### Water Tested

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Driller

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

## Additional Home Repairs

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Service notes: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Service notes: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---



*mi*Ottawa Department of  
**Public Health**

---

12251 James Street Holland, MI 49424-9661 • (616) 396-5266 • Fax (616) 393-5659  
Branch Offices in Grand Haven & Hudsonville • [www.miOttawa.org/miHealth](http://www.miOttawa.org/miHealth)