

# Michigan Environmental Health Association Fact Sheet

An Organization Of Professionals Dedicated To The Improvement Of Health Through The Management Of The Environment  
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## **Buying Property?**

*What you should know about wells and septic systems*

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What you should know about wells and septic systems

### **Before you Buy**

There are parcels of land for sale to build private residential homes on. Many of these parcels may not be served by a public sewer or water system. Homes developed in these areas are served by a private septic tank/absorption field system or septic system and a private well water supply.

When thinking about purchasing property to build on, call your local environmental health representative in your county or district health department. Your health department will perform an evaluation of the property to determine if it can be approved for a well and/or a septic system permit. Many vacant parcels of land are not suitable for a well and/or a septic system.

Property located in subdivisions platted after 1968 should have already been approved for on-site water and septic systems. Property restrictions and/or other conditions may exist and should be discussed with your health department.

It is a good idea to put a clause in your buy/sell agreement which allows you to back out of the agreement if the property is not suitable for either a well and/or a septic system.

### **Some Concerns**

#### **PRIVATE WATER SUPPLY**

**Adequate Volume:** A private water supply, properly designed and constructed, should provide enough water to meet your family's needs. In some areas, a test well may be required prior to construction of a dwelling to be assured of an adequate supply. Your health department has records of wells and can help determine if enough volume is available in your area.

**Quality:** The quality of Michigan's ground water varies throughout the state. The water should have low amounts of minerals which cause hardness, staining, corrosion, undesirable taste, odors, or health concerns.

Your well must not be located where it could become polluted and contaminated. After the well is completed, a bacteriological analysis of your well water must be done to determine if it meets public health standards. The presence of certain bacteria may mean that your drinking water is not properly protected from contamination or the well was not properly disinfected after construction. Your health department can provide help in water sampling.

PRIVATE SEPTIC SYSTEM

A site evaluation by your health department will determine how the following items will affect the operation of your septic system.

**Soil Suitability:** Not all soils are alike, some cannot be approved for a septic system. The soil in the area of a septic system must be able to absorb and filter the daily amount of sewage flow that is expected from your home.

**Ground Water:** Seasonal high ground water can interfere with the operation of your septic system and may cause failure.

**Surface Water:** Your septic system must not be located in areas that may be seasonably wet or subject to flooding. Standing water may be a warning sign to you of possible poor soil drainage conditions.

**Location of Sewage System:** To help protect from pollution and contamination safe distances from water supplies, lakes, ponds, and streams are required by state and local regulations. An area must also be set aside for a replacement system should the septic system fail.

**Slopes:** Steep slopes, such as drop-offs, ravines, and hills may make it difficult or impossible to install a septic system. Care must be taken to prevent the sewage from seeping onto the ground surface.

**Filled Land:** The type of the fill material, as well as the original soils, must be checked to determine if it can be approved for a septic system.

**Check Before You Buy**

\_\_\_ Your Health Department

\_\_\_ Septic System

\_\_\_ Water Supply

\_\_\_ Natural Drainage

\_\_\_ Zoning Requirements

\_\_\_ Special Assessments

\_\_\_ Deed Restrictions

\_\_\_ Utility Availability

\_\_\_ Building Requirements