

Questions to ask before buying a home with a septic system:

Is there a septic permit?

Every septic system installed or modified after 1982 should have a permit on file with the Environmental Health Department.

How many bedrooms is the septic system sized for?

The number of bedrooms listed on the permit should match the number of rooms in the house that can be used as bedrooms.

When was the septic tank pumped last?

If the septic tank has not been pumped in the last 3 to 5 years, it is recommended that the tank be pumped and checked to ensure it's in good working order.

Have the current owners or occupants been experiencing problems with the system?

Ask the owner if they have noticed slow drains or spongy areas in the lawn. If they have, the system may be starting to fail.

Certificate of Compliance

The sizing of a septic system for a residence is based on the number of bedrooms. The size of the septic tank, the size of the drainfield, and in some cases even the type of septic system depends on the number of bedrooms.

Prior to buying or selling a property, it is highly recommended that a Certificate of Compliance is issued. This simple application to the Environmental Health Department will compare the number of bedrooms submitted in the application and the number of bedrooms approved on the septic permit. Typically within 2 business days, the Department will provide a response with a Certificate of Compliance or steps to take to achieve compliance.

The applications are available at the Department office and on our website. You may request and submit an application via email at rceh@rc.mt.gov.

For more information:
Ravalli County Environmental Health
215 S. 4th St., Suite D
Hamilton, MT 59840
Email: rceh@rc.mt.gov
Phone: 406-375-6565
Fax: 406-375-6566
Online:
<https://ravalli.us/159/Environmental-Health>
Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/ravallcountyenvironmentalhealth/>



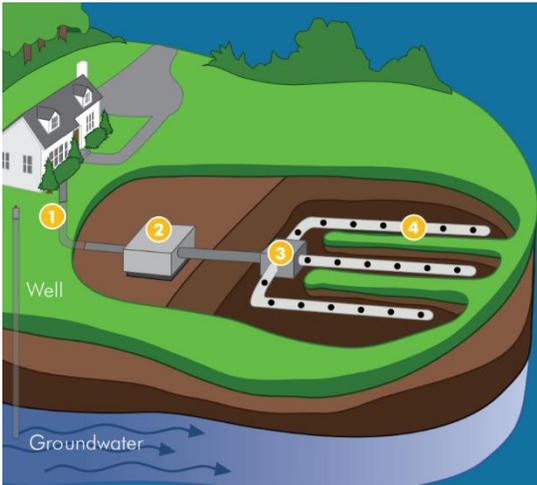
Ravalli County Environmental Health

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HOME BUYER'S GUIDE TO SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Ravalli County requires septic permits for all new, replacement, or altered septic systems.

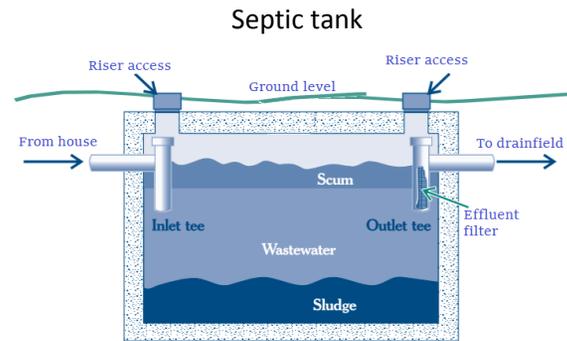
Before buying a house with a septic system, it is very important to obtain a copy of the septic permit.



How Does a Wastewater (Septic) System Work?

1. Wastewater drains from the plumbing of the house to one main drainage pipe that connects to a septic tank.
2. The septic tank receives the wastewater from the house. Once there, the solids settle to the bottom as sludge while the fats, oils, and grease float to the top as scum. An effluent filter is located on the outlet of the tank to prevent solids from making it to the drainfield.
3. There are two ways a septic system can distribute effluent: gravity and pressure. For gravity flow systems, liquid effluent flows out of the tank to a distribution box where it is distributed evenly between the drainfield trenches. For pressure-dosed systems, an effluent pump helps transport

liquid effluent from an additional chamber in a septic tank to pressurized pipes installed throughout the drainfield.



4. When the effluent is distributed to the drainfield, via gravity or pressure flow, it percolates into the soil where microbes in the soil digest or remove most contaminants before it reaches groundwater.

The type, size, and location of a wastewater system vary depending on site-specific conditions of the property such as soil type, setbacks to open water, high water table, and lot size.

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Septic Permits

- Contact rceh@rc.mt.gov to obtain a copy of the septic permit.
- If a copy is not on record, the Department can provide a determination on the status of the existing septic system based on available tax records, subdivision approvals, certificate of surveys, and aerial photos.
- If a septic system was installed without a permit when one was required, the system may be permitted after the fact.
- The system will need to meet current applicable design standards and may also be required to be partially uncovered and inspected as installed.

Note: the homeowner may still have the original copy of the septic permit and never filed with the Department.

To determine if an existing unpermitted septic system can be permitted, the septic system permitting procedures must be followed, including a site evaluation as well as possible groundwater monitoring, a non-degradation analysis, and a septic permit application.

For unpermitted systems that cannot be permitted as installed or after modification, a replacement septic system may be required. In situations where a septic system cannot be permitted, usually due to high groundwater or setbacks restrictions, the matter will be sent to the County Board of Health for compliance determination.