

# Tip of the Mitt: Septic system solutions for Northern Michigan

## Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council

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There are over 1.3 million on-site septic systems in Michigan. It is estimated that at least 10 percent of those have failed and more than one-third of them are not functioning properly.

When septic systems fail or are improperly maintained, they can leach harmful bacteria, nutrients, viruses, pharmaceuticals, and other pollutants into drinking water wells and surface waters, which can lead to serious public health and environmental concerns. The impact of a failing septic system may be especially noticeable in the form of increased plant and algae growth in the nearshore area, which can make boating and swimming undesirable. It can also make it unsafe for swimming due to disease-causing bacteria, viruses, parasites, and other pathogens.

Michigan is the only state in the U.S. that doesn't regulate septic systems at a state level. As a result, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council is currently collaborating with local partners on septic solutions with local governments to provide protections through local ordinances.

In the absence of state-level regulations, there are great opportunities for local governments to protect water quality and human health. To that end, Watershed Council staff are offering their expertise in a series of webinars during May and June that will provide elected officials with tools to manage septic system health. This is the first step in helping local governments adopt septic system ordinances. Watershed Council staff are also available for individual presentations to local municipalities interested in pursuing septic regulations.

In addition, we are excited to announce a series of new publications related to septic management and regulation.

For local governments, we have developed a number of fact sheets including:

1 **The Septic Question Summary.** A summary of policy options for septic regulation for local governments to consider.

2 **Septic Regulation Success Stories in Northern Michigan.** Examples of local governments in Northern Michigan that have acted to protect healthy drinking water, maintain high-quality surface water, and ensure health of citizens by adopting septic ordinances.



Brandon Eldridge, 29 of Charlotte, Mich. and a worker for Ball Septic, adds an extension to an already existing septic tank at a home in Lansing on Oct. 8. ERIC SEALS/DETROIT FREE PRESS

es.

**3 What Do Home Buyers Think of Septic Ordinances?** Results of survey proving septic ordinances are beneficial to both home sellers and buyers, helping to protect long-term investments.

We also have a free guidebook for homeowners — Proper Septic System Maintenance — available for distribution. The guide introduces homeowners to septic systems and provides simple tips for keeping septic systems functioning properly.

It also provides a general timeline for septic tank pumping and tips for assessing and handling system failure. The booklet is available for download on our website at [watershedcouncil.org/septic-systems](http://watershedcouncil.org/septic-systems) or hard copies are available by contacting our office.

For questions or to obtain copies of the publications, please contact policy specialist Kacey Cook at 231-347-1181 or [info@watershedcouncil.org](mailto:info@watershedcouncil.org).

— *Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council: Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council speaks for our members including full-time and seasonal residents, lake associations, and businesses. We work to maintain the environmental integrity and economic and aesthetic values of lakes, streams, wetlands, and groundwater in Northern Michigan, as well as statewide and throughout the Great Lakes Basin. As the lead organization for water resources protection in Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, and Emmet Counties, the Watershed Council is working to preserve the heritage of Northern Michigan — a tradition built around our magnificent waters.*