

Watershed Council collaborating with local partners on septic system solutions

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, they have a series of new publications related to septic management and regulation.

They 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 their website at www.watershedcouncil.org/septic-systems or hard copies are available by contacting their office.

For questions or to obtain copies of the publications, please contact policy specialist Kacey Cook at (231) 347-1181 or info@watershed-council.org. HLL-1-22