

City of Bagley, On-Site Septic System Management Program

February, 2011

The town of Bagley has a special type of sewage treatment system. Whereas most towns are served by a central collection system with usually a sewer lagoon system, Bagley has all on-site septic tank/lateral field systems. These systems are then managed by the County as required by an agreement with the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR).

In 2001 the Dept. of Natural Resources notified the town that it was discharging sewage from individual septic tanks into tile lines that then were discharged into the small streams in the surrounding rural areas. This was, of course, a violation of State (and actually County) rules. The town was required to come up with a plan.

The County Environmental Health Dept. approached the City Council with a far less expensive method than to hire an engineer to design and install a central sewer/lagoon system. The plan was to replace all the improper septic tank systems with proper septic tanks and lateral fields. The cost of this system was in the neighborhood of 1/3 the cost of a central sewer. This plan was similar to one adopted by Jamaica in 2000.

The DNR agreed to this plan and a five-year program for replacement was begun. Property owners signed up for the year they agreed to replace their systems (only 20% allowed to sign up per year) on a first come basis. Those not signing up were drawn from a hat and assigned by filling up year one first and working out to later years.

The five years started with the July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003 year. So the project was to be completed June 30, 2007. On June 30, 2007 less than 1/2 dozen homes remained to be done and by December, 2007 only two homes remained incomplete. Today all homes that currently have water service are completed. Several vacant homes cannot have water service established unless the septic system is installed.

The County Environmental Health Dept. now does walkover inspections of your system each TWO years. A general check will be done to see that the lateral field is not bleeding out, that there is no construction over the field, etc. The observation ports on the laterals will be checked.

Then each FOUR years the septic tank will be opened as well to see if it needs to be pumped out. This pumping is the best way to ensure that the system lasts for a very long time.

The County does charge the City for these inspections. Each six months the City is billed for the time, mileage, etc. involved in enforcing the requirements placed by the DNR. This is a relatively inexpensive program costing only \$1 per month per house. This is much less than a normal sewer bill. Those who have repairs to do or the tank needs pumped receive a letter from the County giving 30 days to take care of any problem. If the notice is not complied with, then the Board of Health begins legal actions.

Anyone considering buying a home in Bagley would be advised to contact this Dept. to get a copy of the septic system and check to see if there are any known problems. There are a few vacant homes in town that have not had systems installed. So before buying any house that's been vacant for a long time it would be advisable to contact this Dept. to determine if the house has a septic system. **County rules require that prior to occupancy such houses must have systems installed. Also, State law now requires mandatory septic inspection when houses are sold.**

Also, our office has a brochure we can provide you that gives a complete history of this project and has a lot of hints on how to maintain your septic system. Stop in or call for a copy of this brochure.

Other sites of interest on this topic:

Septic System Grants & Loans

Percolation test
Septic System Permits