

Do You Really Need A Maintenance Contract?

When maintenance contracts cost between \$150 and \$500 each year, it's understandable to question the real value of keeping up with it. The University of Rhode Island's New England Onsite Wastewater Training Program is dedicated to educating the public and wastewater practitioners about onsite wastewater issues, and their position is clear: ***Maintenance contracts for alternative treatment systems are an absolute necessity.***



What Should My Service Provider Be Doing?

Knowing what's involved in a regular maintenance inspection is critical to making sure you're getting your money's worth.

Maintenance varies by system type, but at the very least, your service provider should:

- *Ask about changes in the system and its use*
- *Evaluate the site and surrounding landscape for possible problems*
- *Take lids off the components to:*
 - *Measure tank solids level*
 - *Clean the filters, pumps, screens, motors, and/or floats, depending on what type of system you have*

If you're dissatisfied with your service, don't simply cancel your contract. Talk to your service provider or call the URI Onsite Wastewater Training Program at 874-5950.

Q. – I feel as if I can't afford to keep the maintenance contract. What do I do?

A. You can't afford not to! Think of septic system maintenance like car maintenance. It keeps your system working efficiently and prevents costly repairs. Without regular maintenance, alternative systems **will** malfunction or fail. Once damage occurs, **repairing or replacing the drainfield or treatment unit can cost thousands to tens of thousands of dollars.**

Q. – My system is working just fine, and I'm very careful with my use of it. Why can't I just call a service provider when I notice a problem?

Alternative systems have mechanical and electrical components. These need to be cleaned or adjusted regularly in order to keep the system running properly and to prevent solids from entering the drainfield where even very small particles can cause damage. Routine servicing also can detect problems that you might not even be aware of, before major repairs are needed.

Q. – Am I actually required to keep a maintenance contract?

A. Yes. Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management legally require that homeowners keep maintenance contracts on their onsite wastewater systems. When a homeowner cancels the contract, the service provider notifies the Town's wastewater manager.

Q. – Why is my maintenance contract a Town concern?

A. When an onsite wastewater system fails, it's not just the homeowner who is affected. Improperly treated wastewater contains bacteria, viruses, and other pollutants that can seep onto the ground or leach straight into groundwater that we drink. This is a health hazard for the general public, and is especially dangerous for families with children.

If you're thinking about cancelling your maintenance contract, think again! Those regular inspections are required, but even more importantly, the annual expense is a small price to pay compared to the repair or replacement costs you could face, and the damage a failing system can do to your drinking water and family's health.