Home Septic Tank and Drainfield Assessment

For each category, read across to the right and circle the statement that BEST describes the condition on your property. If you do not have enough information to make a selection, skip that item. Mark the box at the end of each row that represents your risk. Make a list of those items that are ranked as a High Risk and what you plan to do to reduce the risks.

		LOW RISK	MODERATE RISK	HIGH RISK	YOUR RISK
SEPTIC SYSTEM DESIGN AND LOCATION					
1	**Age and type of system**	System is 5 years old or less. Certificate of Satisfactory Completion was issued after installation **OR** New system is an Alternative Treatment Technology (ATT) type.	System was installed after 1974 according to the code at the time of installation.	System was installed before 1974 **OR** not according to the code **OR** a metal tank of any age **OR** system location is unknown.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
2	**Size of property**	Home on more than 2 acres. Drainfield replacement area identified and has not been altered.	One or two acre parcel. Drainfield replacement area identified, has not been altered and is definitely available.	Less than 1 acre lot **OR** do not have a designated area for drainfield replacement.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
3	**Size of tank**	Septic tank has *excess capacity* based on the number of bedrooms in use. Minimum requirements are 1000 gallons for up to 4 bedrooms, 1500 for 5 bedrooms. Larger tank sometimes required.	Tanks meets minimum requirement for size of household. Smaller tanks may be adequate if only one or two people live in household and water is not heavily used.	Tank smaller than needed for household. Bathrooms, bedrooms, or water using appliances have been added. In-home business or hobby increases waste-water. **OR** septic tank size is unknown.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
4	**Separation distance--DRAINFIELD**	Drainfield is at least 100 feet *and downslope* from all wells. No wells or water bodies, such as streams or lakes are within 200 feet *downslope* of drainfield.	Drainfield meets the minimum separation distance of 100 feet to all wells and water bodies, or a special permit was issued.	Drainfield is less than 100 feet from a well or water body without a special permit (*Violates law if installed after 1979, less than 50 feet violates law if after 1962*) **OR** drainfield location is unknown.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
5	**Separation distance—SEPTIC TANK**	Septic tank is at least 50 feet from all wells or water bodies.	Septic tank is less than 50 feet from well or water body, but a special permit was issued and the tank is inspected regularly.	Septic tank is less than 50 feet from a well or water body (*Violates the law if installed after 1962*) **OR** the tank location is unknown.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
6	**Additional treatment**	Standard septic system is adequate for treating waste water. No additional treatment is needed. **OR** additional treatment is in use as designed, is functioning and inspected regularly.		Additional treatment would be required for new construction **OR** additional treatment system has not been maintained **OR** *not sure* the current treatment system is adequate.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High

SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE					
7	**Tank pumping**	The septic tank is pumped on a regular basis as indicated by annual inspection or using a pumping frequency chart. Records are kept.	Last pumping was less than three years ago. (Longer is OK if it was recommended for your situation).	Pumping history is unknown **OR** nobody remembers exactly when the last pumping was.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
8	**Maps and records**	Map of property shows the location of the septic tank and drainfield. Installation, inspection and maintenance details are recorded.	Information about installation, inspection and repairs is generally known, but not recorded.	Installation and repair history is unknown.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
9	**Condition of tank and baffles**	The baffles have been inspected within the last year. Tank inspected during last regular pumping. No problems found.	No inspection ports. Tank and baffles were inspected during last regular pumping. No repairs needed at that time.	The condition of the tank and baffles is unknown **OR** repairs are needed.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
10	**Drainfield protection**	Vehicles, heavy animals, structures and other heavy objects are kept off of the drainfield.	Occasionally, vehicles or heavy animals cross the drainfield area but only when the soil is not wet.	Vehicles or heavy animals regularly enter the drainfield area **OR** structures are built over the area **OR** the drainfield location is unknown.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
11	**Planting over the drainfield**	Grass or similar groundcover is growing over the drainfield.		Trees, shrubs, intensive gardening activities or bare soil occur over the drainfield.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
12	**Diverting surface runoff**	All surface water runoff is diverted away from the drainfield and septic tank area.	Some surface runoff may flow across the drainfield area. Never any standing water.	Runoff from driveways, rooftops, land, etc. flows into the drainfield area **OR** occasional flooding may be possible from rising waters.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
13	**Signs of trouble**	Household drains flow freely. There are no sewage odors indoors or out. Soil over the drainfield is firm and as dry as the surrounding area.	Household drains *rarely* run slowly. Soil over drainfield may be moist, but never soggy. No moisture above septic tank. No odors.	Drains back up **OR** sewage odor in the house or yard **OR** drainfield area soggy or has black, smelly liquid, or excess growth of grass, too wet to mow **OR** unusual moisture over the septic tank.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
SEPTIC SYSTEM INPUTS					
14	**Solids**	No garbage disposal used in kitchen. Grease wiped from utensils before washing. *Nothing* flushed down toilet except toilet paper and human waste.	Light use of a garbage disposal. Some solids are occasionally disposed of down the drain.	Garbage disposal used for most food waste. Coffee grounds or cooking oil washed down drain. Toilet regularly used as garbage can. Pharmaceuticals disposed by flushing down toilet.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High

15	**Household Cleaners**	Products labeled danger, warning, corrosive, flammable, combustible, reactive or poison are avoided and alternatives are sought. Water soluble products such as chlorine bleach, ammonia or detergent are used according to label instructions.	When hazardous cleaners are used, care is taken to keep them out of the waste water system-minimal amounts are washed down the drain during cleaning, rags are disposed of instead of washing, excess product is saved for later use.	Furniture polish, lye-based oven cleaner, brass and silver polish or solvent-based cleaning fluid are used regularly and added to the waste water system. Heavy use of chlorine bleach. Excess product is sometimes poured down the drain.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
16	**Drain cleaners and septic system additives**	No septic system additives are used. Clogged drains are cleared with a plumbing snake or the use of a plunger.	System additives with bacteria or enzymes are used (*harmless, but they haven't been shown to be effective*). Mild drain cleaners are used infrequently.	Septic system additives with chemical cleaners, caustic agents, acids or degreaser are use (very serious concern for groundwater). Drain cleaners used regularly or not attention is given to the ingredients when they are purchased.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
17	**Hazardous chemicals**	Hazardous chemicals are very rarely used on the premises. No auto repair fluids or solvents, no oil based paint or pain thinner, no hazardous art or hobby supplies, no pesticides, etc.	Hazardous chemicals are used but care is taken to prevent them from entering the septic system. Leftover materials are taken to hazardous waste collection events, if available.	Hazardous products like pesticides, petroleum products, paint thinner or antifreeze have been disposed of down the drain, even if just once.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
18	**Amount of water used**	Most fixtures and appliances are water conserving designs. Drips and leaks are fixed immediately. Efforts are made to reduce water usage. (Water use is less than 20 gallons per person per day).	No water-conserving fixtures or practices used. No leaks or drips. Water use is less than 60 gallons per person per day. (A running toilet can add about 1000 gallons per day).	No water-conserving fixtures. Leaks or drips need repair. Water used freely in the home. Water use exceeds 60 gallons per person per day.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
19	**Timing of water usage**	Efforts are made to spread out the use of water.	Attention is not given to water-use timing, but heavy water-use periods generally do not occur.	Heavy water-use periods in the home. Many loads of laundry on same day, a large family bathing at same time of day, long showers, etc.	☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High

Adapted with permission from Home*A*Syst: An Environmental Risk-Assessment Guide for the Home, NRAES-87.