



Washington County Health Department

1302 Pennsylvania Avenue, Hagerstown, MD 21742

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General Percolation Test Information

1. Before digging any percolation test holes or observation trenches, it is recommended that the applicant or landowner consult with an Environmental Health Specialist or Washington County Licensed Septic Contractor to determine whether the soil type is seasonal or unacceptable for testing. **The testing period for seasonal soils is generally February 15 to April 30 but may vary based on seasonal weather conditions.**
2. It is recommended that the applicant or property owner consult with a Washington County Certified Septic Installer/Designer for an Onsite Evaluation of your property to investigate the feasibility of a septic system before the actual percolation test day. Due to the Karst (limestone) topography in Washington County, MD, properties may be limited as to where the Septic Reserve Area can be located.
3. The property owner, applicant, or contractor is responsible for the excavation of percolation test holes, as well as scheduling the test with Washington County Health Department.

Day of the Percolation Test

4. An observation trench, dug to a minimum depth of seven feet running east or west, is necessary for absorption field area evaluations. Four feet of filterable material beneath the installation must be exposed. When a limiting factor such as rock or a water table is encountered, approval cannot be given. Most new lots in the limestone regions of the county require a minimum of four trenches; the number may vary based on hydrogeological findings.
5. A minimum of six percolation test holes shall be dug within the proposed absorption area. Holes shall be spaced on 15- to 25-foot centers on two rows with a minimum of three holes in each row. All percolation test holes must be within a 50-foot radius of the soil profile excavation.
6. The circular holes should be dug or augered with a uniform diameter from 12 to 15 inches. If a power auger is used to dig the holes, extra precaution should be taken as to not alter or artificially smear the soil sidewalls. The depth of the holes shall be equal to the proposed depth of the base of the absorption area. Percolation test hole depths for conventional installations will range from 24 to 36 inches, pending the presence of a limiting condition.
7. The bottom and sides of each percolation test hole shall be thoroughly scarified with a knife blade, chisel, or other sharp, pointed object. This is done to counter the artificially disturbed soil interface which resulted from digging the hole. After scarifying the hole, all loose material shall be removed from the sides and bottom.
8. The property owner, applicant, or contractor shall provide a minimum water supply source of five gallons for each hole to be tested. Where no direct water source is available, a 30- to 55-gallon barrel is recommended. Containers must be clean of residue, and water should be relatively free of solid or liquid impurities.
9. When the percolation test has been completed, the property owner, applicant, or contractor is responsible for properly backfilling each percolation test hole.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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