

Why Are Septic Systems a Problem?

In shoreland areas it is particularly important to maintain your septic system properly because soil and water conditions near shore may make the system less efficient in treating wastewater. Incomplete treatment can result in health risks for humans and water quality problems.

Potential health risks are the most serious concern related to failing septic systems. Hepatitis, dysentery, and other diseases may be spread by bacteria, viruses, and parasites in wastewater. These disease-causing organisms, called pathogens, may make nearshore water unsafe for recreation. Flies and mosquitoes that are attracted to and breed in wet areas where wastewater reaches the surface may also spread disease.

Many of the synthetic cleaning products or other chemicals used around the house can be toxic to humans, pets, and wildlife. These products may reach the ground surface or end up in the water.

Excessive nitrate levels in drinking water can result in serious health problems for infants. High nitrate levels in ground water can result from inadequately treated wastewater.

Inadequate treatment can also allow excess nutrients to reach your lake or stream, promoting algae or weed growth. Algal blooms and abundant weeds not only make the lake unpleasant for swimming and boating, but they also affect water quality for fish and wildlife habitat. As plants die, settle to the bottom, and decompose, they use up oxygen that fish need to survive.