

NPDES & SPRAY SYSTEM SAMPLING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why does my system require sampling?

Two types of systems require annual sampling in Geauga County: NPDES and Spray Irrigation. A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) is a special type of Home Sewage Treatment System (HSTS) that is issued a permit through the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) to discharge treated wastewater, or effluent, directly into a public waterway (a creek, ditch, storm drain, etc.). It is therefore critical that a NPDES tank completely treats the wastewater before it is released. Due to the higher risk of water pollution, the system has been specially designed and lab tested to reach a state-wide treatment standard. In order to achieve this higher level of treatment, however, the system contains more mechanical components than a conventional system (e.g. a septic tank to leach lines). Because of its complexity, this system requires annual sampling in addition to frequent maintenance, and cautious use by the homeowner. Spray Irrigation systems are similar to NPDES, except that treated wastewater is distributed onto the surface of the ground. Because these systems pose a similar risk, sampling is required locally to monitor their performance.

What is being tested? Why?

NPDES systems will be sampled for all 4 of the parameters required by the NPDES discharging permit (Dissolved Oxygen (DO), Ammonia, Total Suspended Solids (TSS), and E. coli). Spray systems will be tested for Total Suspended Solids (TSS), Carbonaceous Biochemical Oxygen Demand (CBOD₅), and fecal coliform, in accordance with the standards set in the system's special device approval. These parameters help to evaluate performance of your system against required environmental and public health standards. More explanation can be found on the [NPDES Quick-Tips Guide](#).

Will samples be scheduled in advance? Is indoor access needed?

Samples will not be scheduled in advance, except for special circumstances such as system inaccessibility, system malfunctioning, or insufficient flow to take a sample. Indoor access is not necessary, but samplers may request that you run water in the house for a short period of time.

Do I need to be home for sample collection?

Homeowners do not need to be present for sampling, but are welcome to observe the sampling process. Sampling staff will always knock/ring the doorbell prior to walking through the property. If no one answers the door, samplers will proceed to take the sample but will leave a door-hanger to notify the homeowner. Fences will not be opened without explicit permission.

How will I recognize Geauga Public Health (GPH) employees?

GPH sampling employees will arrive in a county vehicle and will be able to show a Geauga Public Health Photo Badge. Systems will only be sampled 8:00am-2:00pm on Mondays-Thursdays, unless otherwise scheduled.

How and when will I receive my results?

Sample results will be mailed within a few weeks of sample collection to the mailing address on file.

What will happen if my sample fails?

Systems that fail the sample will be required to obtain service from a Geauga County-registered service provider certified by the manufacturer of the system and provide proof of that service to GPH.

Do I still need service if I get sampled?

Yes. Sampling only *evaluates* the performance of the system, while service *enhances* performance. Your state-issued NPDES discharging permit requires both annual sampling of the discharge effluent AND 2 service visits per year under contract from a county-registered service provider certified by the manufacturer of your system. Permit and/or sampling costs do not cover the costs of services obtained.

Where can I find a list of registered service providers? How can I determine the manufacturer of my system?

The list of registered service providers can be found on the Operation & Maintenance web-page at gphohio.org/om-septic. This list shows the manufacturer certifications held by each provider so that you can easily find which companies are acceptable for your system and call to compare pricing. The manufacturer name can often be found on the control panel of your system, but you can also call GPH to check your records.

How will I be notified of my sample fee and due date? How can I pay?

You will be mailed a bill in advance of sample collection which will provide the sample fee deadline. Letters will be mailed out a little over a month before the fee is due. Payments can be made by mail, phone, or in person and checks, cash, and card are all accepted. Additional processing fees apply for card payments.

What will happen if I don't pay?

If the sample payment is not received/postmarked by the due date, a 25% late fee will be added and a final notice will be sent certified mail. If the outstanding amount remains unpaid after 30 additional days, the total amount will be certified to the Geauga County Auditor to be placed as a lien on your property taxes, per Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 319.218.

I was charged for an Operation Permit when I got this system. Why am I being charged again?

This annual fee is not a permit fee, but only to cover the cost of the Ohio EPA-mandated sampling, including manpower, lab fees, and postage. Any previously issued operation permits will be honored until their expiration. Permit renewal fees will not be charged until the old permit ends.

I have neighbors with older systems that haven't been charged yet. Why?

All Home Sewage Treatment Systems (HSTS) will be issued operation permits in the future, however, this sampling requirement and fee only applies to NPDES discharging systems and Spray Irrigation systems, which have a more direct influence on surface water quality. Because these systems rely solely on mechanical components to properly treat your wastewater (instead of having additional filtration through the soil), they require more frequent maintenance for these components as well as annual sampling.