



Guidelines for Conducting OSDS Inspections in Accordance with MDE's 4-Step Procedure*

1. **Homeowner/Occupant Interview:** Interview results may be included in or separate from the evaluation report. Questions should include:
 - Is the property vacant? If not, how many people live in the home?
 - Has it been a rental property?
 - Are there any commercial uses?
 - Is the property only used seasonally?
 - How many bedrooms are in the home?
 - Have you ever had any problems with your system? If yes, describe in detail.
 - When was the last septic cleaning?
 - Where is your septic tank and is it accessible at grade, without having to dig?
 - Where is the field system?

2. **File/Records Search:** Note date and organization where records were requested. Include copies of whatever was obtained. *The purpose of the file search is to determine what, if any, archival information is available about the OSDS on the property. This information is generally available from the local health (or environmental health) departments. A public Information Act (PIA) request letter may be required and there may be a fee associated with this service. A waiting period may also be required for research to be completed. Archival information may not be available for all systems.*

3. **Site and System Inspection:** Must locate and access septic tank for visual inspection. Septic tank must be structurally sound. Tanks should be watertight. If system has no access, digging is required. Tanks should not be pumped before an inspection of the liquid level. A system may be unsatisfactory due to unreasonable access to the tank or if it is deeper than 2.5 ft below grade. A detailed inspection form (like a checklist) that highlights the key points of an inspection should be used and include:
 - Verification that inlet and outlet baffles are present.
 - Determination of size and construction of septic tank.
 - Location and assessment of the absorption system by conducting a hydraulic load, evaluation of the distribution box, and/or probing.
 - Verification that toilets or drains on the lowest level of the house flush or drain adequately.
 - Verification that there should be no discharges of effluent to the ground surface or surface waters.



4. Final Report: The final report should be a document summarizing the findings in Steps 1, 2 and 3 for the subject property.

It is recommended that the report include a cover page with the following information:

- Company name, company phone number, and name of inspector
- Date, time, address of site inspection
- Note if you were able to retain County records. It should be noted if no information was available or if the information was requested but not received as of the date of the final report.
- Note if the homeowner/occupant interview was performed, or why it was not.
- Number of people moving in (if information is available)
- Information from the current or recent occupants of the house/facility about the OSDS operation and usage

The minimum reporting requirements for the Site and System Inspection include:

- A description what was done:
 - Pumping, digging, probing, etc.
 - Hydraulic load test or reason for not running water
- A list of the type, size and number of system components and the observed soundness of the system components:
 - Tank size and composition
 - Drainfields, drywell, drip, sand mound, LPD, etc.
 - Does the system have a pump?
 - Does the system have any advanced treatment?
 - Are there any maintenance contracts on components?
- A general map/location of system; showing the location of all system components relative to the house and/or other prominent site features (eg., sheds, pools, etc) May use County records if obtained and described in the records and confirmed at site visit
- Any negative or unacceptable observations, or findings that would cause concern to a property owner - include pictures if possible.
- Detail what must happen to bring all areas up to acceptable if any deficiencies were found, and what should be done based upon the observed conditions and anticipated usage of the system (e.g., pumping septic tank, replacing tank, repairing/adding to the soil absorption system, etc).

*The 4-Step Procedure was adopted by MDE as per the May 8, 1997 memorandum from Jane Gottfredson, Program Manager of the Ground Water Permits Program, to the Maryland Conference of Environmental Health Directors.