



Replacement and Retrofit Program FAQs

What is a cesspool?

Cesspools are antiquated structures that receive raw waste from the house and allow the untreated household effluent (wastewater) to leach into the surrounding soil, ultimately leading into ground and surface waters. The solid portion is contained in the cesspool interior that requires intermittent pump-outs.

What is a conventional septic system?

Conventional septic systems on Long Island consist of a septic tank and leaching structure(s) such as a leaching pool. Household waste enters the septic tank where wastewater is stored while solids settle to the bottom and fats, oils, and greases float to the top, forming a “clear zone” of effluent (wastewater) in the middle of the tank. This “clear effluent” is what is discharged to the leaching pool for final disposal, providing minimal treatment of nutrients such as nitrogen, pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and volatile organic compounds.

What is an Innovative and Alternative Systems?

Innovative and Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (I/A OWTS) provide a cost-effective and environmentally sound alternative to sewers in portions of Suffolk County that are outside designated sewer areas. These systems significantly reduce nitrogen and, in many instances, reduce or eliminate levels of other contaminants of concern such as pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and volatile organic compounds found in traditional cesspools and septic systems. I/A OWTS can provide greater reliability for performance and reduce the number of pump outs for homeowners that currently pump out their wastewater systems more than once a year.

What conditions should be considered in replacing the existing system?

Has there been a history of trouble? Do you experience slow-draining, gurgling toilet and occasional rank odors? Does your system get pumped out frequently? How old is the system and when was it permitted? Is the existing system constructed of blocks?

As of July 1, 2019 do I have to replace my cesspool? If so do I need an I/A OWTS?

As of July 1, 2019 you will no longer be able to replace a cesspool with a cesspool. Property owners who decide to voluntarily upgrade their existing system MUST install a septic tank prior to the leaching structure in accordance with current standards.

Suffolk County does not require I/A OWTS at this time. However, homeowners should consult local Towns and Villages as they may have requirements for I/A OWTS.

When I sell my house will I need to replace my septic system?

Suffolk County is not currently requiring homeowners to replace their current system at the time of property transfer.

If I pump my cesspool more than four (4) times per year, do I have to replace my cesspool?

No, homeowners can continue to pump out their system as often as they wish to do so. However, when they voluntarily choose to upgrade their existing system they MUST install a septic tank prior to the leaching structure in accordance with current standards.

Do I need a permit from Suffolk County Health Department to replace my cesspool?



Property owners who decide to voluntarily upgrade their existing septic system must receive approval from the Department in accordance with Article 6 and standards for the replacement or retrofit of the system. When the work is completed the contractor will file a registration with the department.

What is the cost difference between a cesspool, conventional septic system and an I/A OWTS?

An average cesspool costs between \$2,000 and \$4,000, an average conventional septic system costs between \$6,000 and \$8,000, and an I/A OWTS costs around \$22,000. However, costs vary depending on site constraints such as small lot size, high groundwater table, and poor soils.

Who completes the paper work required by Suffolk County Department of Health Services?

Your licensed Liquid Waste Contractor will complete the necessary notification and registration with the Department

Is There a Registration fee associated with upgrading my cesspool?

No, there is currently no permit costs associated with replacements or retrofits of existing sanitary systems.

Does the process require any approvals at the Town level? Does the Town Code play a role?

The Liquid Waste Contractor should check with the local town/village building department to verify if a permit or wetlands permit is required for the proposed project.