

Department of Safety and Inspections

Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS)

Issue: Saint Paul is required by the MPCA to update the Saint Paul's SSTS ordinance.

Background:

Minnesota State law and Saint Paul Ordinance regulate the placement, type, permissibility, capacity, and maintenance of sub-surface treatment systems (SSTSs). In 2008, the MPCA required all counties to update their SSTS laws within a twenty four (24) month period. All responsible municipalities were required to update their SSTS laws within a twelve (12) month period after the adoption of the counties' laws.

Within Saint Paul, the geography of one area (Highwood) contributes to the current existence of SSTSs. The number of systems continues to decline as city sewer and water is extended into these areas and existing SSTS systems have aged to the point of needing replacement.

Since the reduction of DSI staff, due to the State takeover of Environmental Health responsibilities, the City's SSTS program has been minimally staffed and complaint driven.

Over the past year, the Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI):

- Brought all SSTSs in Saint Paul into compliance with current City Ordinance.
- Worked with MPCA and City Attorney's Office to draft updated ordinance language.
- There are current 81 SSTSs in Saint Paul: (2 holding tanks and 79 septic systems (20 septic systems are cesspools and/or drywells – aka Statute defined as failing)).

Recommendation:

Adopt Ordinance as amended. This includes:

- Minor changes; e.g.
 - Correct the septic tank sizing/liquid capacities.
 - Reduce replacement times in cases of threats to groundwater and imminent threat to public health or safety, but give Building Official discretion to extend.
- Substantial changes.
 - Changes represent alignment with state/regional standards, appreciation for the types of SSTS systems currently allowed by law, and DSI staffing levels.
 - The changes are:
 - Require replacement of Cesspools/Seepage/Leaching pits at time of property transfer or within 3 years. Latter may receive 2 year extension.
 - Require SSTS systems to be inspected and pumped every 3 years instead of the current every 2 year requirement.
 - Require 50 foot spacing requirement between SSTSs and wells instead of the current 75 feet requirement.

Next Steps:

- Community Meeting with impacted property owners
- Public Hearing and Ordinance Adoption
- Identify available resources and work with impacted property owners