

**Maine Division of Health Engineering**  
**&**  
**Maine Association of Site Evaluators**

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Paraphrased: MASE Septic System Inspection Guidelines & 2015 Maine Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules

Prior to 2002 the USEPA and NOAA had reviewed Maine's rules and determined it to be acceptable, except for the septic system inspection program. The Maine DEP had tried several years prior to improve the program through legislative process but was unsuccessful. The Maine DEP contacted MASE and asked if it would try to develop official minimum guidelines, but the effort was also unsuccessful. Eventually, voluntary guidelines were set for both the MDHE and MASE.

**Basic Concepts:**

- The program should be Voluntary.
- The Private Sector is more demanding.
- In the State of Maine, the Real Estate Industry does more to 'police' and upgrade septic systems than the government.
- Best time for inspection is at the sale of the property, when genuine interest and access is standard procedure.
- Information acquired by the inspector is the sole property of their client.
- Septic system inspections should allow for and be inclusive of the various professionals providing the service.

## **Maine Division of Health Engineering Guidelines:**

- Inspect Septic Tank & Observe Ground (surface ONLY)

### **“MALFUNCTIONING”:**

*“A system that is not operating or is not functioning properly, based on the following indicators: Ponding or outbreak of wastewater or septic tank effluent onto the surface of the ground; seepage of wastewater or septic tank effluent into parts of buildings below ground; back-up of wastewater into the building being served that is not caused by a physical blockage of the internal plumbing; and contamination of nearby water wells and water bodies/courses.”*

*“When a “malfunctioning” system, as defined in these Rules, is discovered, the system must be corrected, or its use discontinued, within that period of time required by the LPI’s order.”*

The purpose of the States criteria is to remain “NEUTRAL”. It only flags systems as “unsatisfactory” if the system has end of life symptoms above ground. These guidelines are focused on Code Enforcement and Compliance and are less demanding for private sector needs (like real estate transactions).

## **Maine Association of Site Evaluators Guidelines:**

1. Inspect Septic Tank
2. Dig Observation Hole(s) into Disposal Area

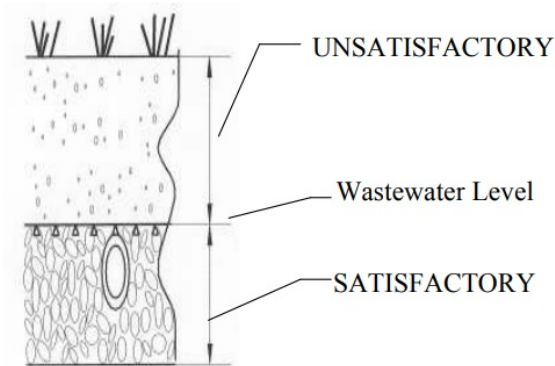
*“FAILURE”:* One or more of the following conditions observed:

- *Outbreak of wastewater effluent observed on ground surface or pipe discharging to ditch, water body, or ground surface.*
- *Liquid level in septic tank above invert of outlet pipe showing abnormal conditions.*
- *Liquid level in disposal area above stone or proprietary leaching device(s).*
- *Backup of sewage into households, other than a temporary blockage (Definition by Code).*
- *Pollution to the surface waters or ground waters (Definition by Code).*

The purpose of the MASE criteria is to work for the “CLIENT”. This criteria flags systems as “unsatisfactory” when the liquid level in the disposal area is above the stone or proprietary device(s). These guidelines are focused on functionality of the system to meet the user’s needs and are more demanding consistent with the private sector requirements.

## Division of Health Engineering

### MASE

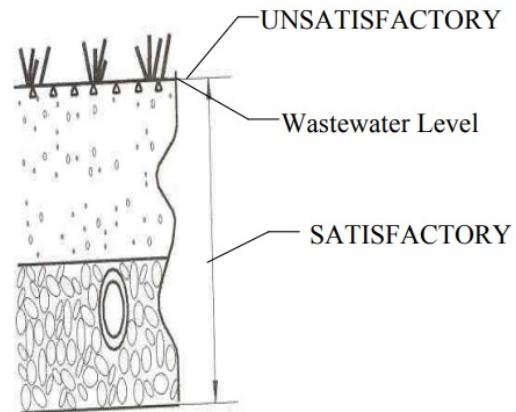


#### Level I

\*Infer problem with liquid in septic tank outlet pipe & ground observation

#### Level II

\*Need to dig Observation Hole into Disposal Area



\*No Observation Required into Disposal Bed

### **Conclusion:**

As stated, Septic system inspections should allow for and be inclusive of the various professionals providing the service. This includes guidelines set by home inspection organizations. However, in spite of these guidelines being “voluntary”, it is my professional opinion that the private sector in Maine should demand that when the terms “Malfunctioning” or “Failure” are used in official documents (like septic reports), they adhere to the definitions from MASE and MDHE.