



Frequently Asked Questions: Perc testing

1. How do I know what type of perc test to apply for?

You can apply for either a drainfield perc test, a sand mound perc test or both. If you apply for both and one is not completed, a refund will be issued. Typically if a property has never been tested, you start with a drainfield test and then move to a sand mound test if the drainfield test does not pass. If you're not sure what testing has been done in the past, just apply for one or the other. The Health Department will review the type of test that was applied for and will reach out to you if there are any questions. Adjustments are also made while in the field during the test if needed.

2. How many perc tests should I apply for?

One perc test means that one area on the property will be evaluated so if you have more than one area you want to test, you need to apply for that many perc tests. If you want to test 4 or more areas, a concept plan is required to be submitted.

3. I have paid and applied for a perc test, what happens next?

The perc test application is forwarded to the Environmental Health Division at the Health Department for review. The application is reviewed to determine if the soils that are present on the property need to be tested during the wet season which typically occurs between February-May. You will be notified if your application needs to be put on hold and have the option to request a refund or wait until the perc test can be completed.

4. If my application is put on hold for wet season, how will I know when the wet season begins?

Once wet season perc testing is able to begin, you will be notified by the Health Department with a date and time for the perc test to be completed.

5. What do I need to do once I receive the perc test date and time from the Health Department?

It will be your responsibility to hire a St. Mary's County licensed septic contractor to be onsite at the same time as the Health Department. They must come prepared with the appropriate equipment needed to run a perc test (ie: backhoe, hand auger with extensions, sufficient amount of water)

6. Where can I find a list of St. Mary's County licensed septic contractors?

You can either call or email the Environmental Health Division at 301-475-4321 or smchd.env@maryland.gov to request a list.

7. Do I need to be onsite during the perc test?

You do not need to be onsite but someone (either your septic contractor or another representative) needs to know where the property lines are located. If you are unsure or will not be able to have someone there who knows, you need to have a surveyor stake the property lines prior to the perc test date. It is not the responsibility of the Health Department to know where the property boundaries are located. If the perc test needs to be canceled because property lines are not clear and the site must be evaluated during the wet season, there is no guarantee that the perc test can be rescheduled during the same year.

8. How many perc test holes will be dug?

A perc test consists of 2-4 holes being dug in one area. If you apply/pay for one perc test, only one area on the property will be evaluated.

9. My property is wooded, should the site be prepped?

Yes. The time that is allotted for a perc test does not include time to have the area cleared. If you have a wooded lot that needs to have paths cleared on an area cleared for the perc test to be completed, it needs to be done ahead of the perc test date. If the perc test needs to be canceled because the site is not accessible and the site must be evaluated during the wet season, there is no guarantee that the perc test can be rescheduled during the same year.

10. If the perc test is satisfactory, am I able to develop the property?

A satisfactory perc test does not guarantee development rights for a property. A number of other agencies have minimum requirements that need to be met in order for a property to be developed.

11. Once the perc test has been completed and was satisfactory, what are my next steps?

The perc test locations need to be located by a surveyor so they can submit a plan with those perc test locations to the Health Department for review and approval. Once a plan is approved with the perc test locations, those locations are good for as long as there are no changes in regulations. If you do not have the locations recorded on a surveyed plan with Health Department approval, you take the chance of the perc test locations no longer being visible in the field and having to be redone.