



# Perc Testing

## Fact Sheet

### The Basics

A perc test is a soils test to determine if the soils and groundwater conditions on a property are suitable for use as an on-site sewage disposal system. All properties not served by public water and sewer must have this test before beginning construction of any structure with plumbing. If an area of acceptable soils is found, a plat is established of the area to be designated for sewage disposal. Perc tests are performed when contemplating new construction, adding on to land already served by on-site systems and when a system fails.

### Considerations for Constructing Additions

In cases involving additions to houses, the health department researches records to try and determine the capacity of an existing system. If the proposed addition will potentially increase sewage flow, approval of the addition requires establishing adequate sewage disposal capacity. In some cases, properties with older homes may be required to undergo a perc test.

### Perc Testing Process: Step-By-Step

1. **Apply for a perc test** at the Department of Land Use and Growth Management, Permit Services office. There is an application fee and a service fee.
2. The **application is forwarded** to the St. Mary's County Health Department's Environmental Health Services. After reviewing the application, Environmental Health staff will contact the owner to schedule the test. Times are coordinated with the owner, health department, and licensed septic installer, *who must be contracted by the owner*. The fee for digging a perc test pit is variable.
3. Tests are mainly **performed during "wet months"** (usually February, March, April) to ensure that an adequate high water table separation is maintained. This helps in preventing contamination of groundwater.
4. **Preliminary results are generally known** the day of testing. Final approval is contingent on the submittal plan defined by a Maryland registered land surveyor. This plan shows perc locations, proposed sewage disposal area, topography in two foot contours and adjoining wells and sewage disposal systems.
5. If approved, the **perc test remains valid** unless septic regulations change. The septic area approval may also be voided by changes in topography or use of the area.

#### For more information:

- St. Mary's County Health Department: Environmental Health Services- 301-475-4321
- St. Mary's County Department of Land Use and Growth Management, Permit Services Office- 301-475-4200 x1500