

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is the Kelle's Creek Septic System Inspection Program? The purpose of this voluntary pilot program is to inspect existing subsurface sewage treatment systems within the Kelle's Creek watershed. The Valley Branch Watershed District (VBWD) will hire state-licensed professionals to inspect septic tanks and soil treatment areas of willing landowners to determine whether systems meet public health and environmental protection standards.

2. When are septic system inspections typically required? Per the Washington County Subsurface Sewage Treatment System Regulations, septic system inspections are required:

- Prior to the sale of property, unless the age of the system is less than 5 years.
- Prior to the expansion of property (e.g., addition of bedrooms).
- If deemed necessary by Washington County.

Additionally, as part of routine septic system maintenance, Washington County requires pumping of the septic system tank every 3 years.

3. Am I required to participate in the Kelle's Creek septic system inspection program? If I do participate, what is involved? This pilot program is entirely voluntary; neither the VBWD nor Washington County will require any property owner to participate. If a landowner within the Kelle's Creek watershed wants to participate, the VBWD will hire state-licensed septic system compliance inspectors to inspect individual systems. Using the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) inspection form, the inspector will examine septic tanks and soil treatment areas to confirm that:

- Septic tanks are watertight.
- There is no ground surface sewage discharge or backup into the house.
- There is adequate vertical separation between the soil treatment area and saturated soil or bedrock.
- The systems meet the requirements outlined in the Washington County Subsurface Sewage Treatment System Regulations.

4. Why is inspecting my septic system important? Locating and fixing noncompliant septic systems protects the environment and public health by protecting surface water and groundwater. Kelle's Creek is currently impaired for elevated levels of *E. coli* bacteria (present in human and animal waste). A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency study identified noncompliant (failing) septic systems as one of the primary sources of *E. coli*.

-
5. **How do I know if I live within the Kelle's Creek watershed?** Please check the map attached (or at http://www.vbwd.org/KellesCreek/KellesSSTSTMap_April2016.pdf) and associated property list on the VBWD website (http://www.vbwd.org/KellesCreek/KellesSSTSTProperties_April2016.pdf) to determine if your property is located within the Kelle's Creek watershed.
 6. **How do I request a septic system inspection?** Once you've verified that you live within the Kelle's Creek watershed (see item 5 above), you must complete and submit the [Kelle's Creek Watershed Septic System Inspection Application](#) on the VBWD website. By submitting this application, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in the program and authorizing the VBWD to begin the septic system inspection process. Although the state-licensed septic system inspector will typically contact you within 2 weeks of notification of the inspection request, if a septic system inspection is requested during the winter and conditions will not allow for inspection, then the septic system inspection may not occur until the following spring.
 7. **Will the septic system inspection cost me anything?** No. The VBWD received a 2015 State of Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources Clean Water Fund grant and is providing the inspection and related services at no cost to willing property owners. Septic system inspections typically cost \$400–\$500.
 8. **Will I need to be present for the septic system inspection?** No. Once you have submitted your request, a state-licensed inspector will call to coordinate the septic system inspection. The inspector may request any information you have on your system and ask that you locate the septic tank and soil treatment area on your property.
 9. **When will the inspection take place?** The septic system inspections conducted as part of this program will be completed from the spring of 2016 through the fall of 2017. The program will continue as long as there are grant funds remaining with the ultimate grant deadline of 12/31/2017.
 10. **How will I know the inspection results?** The state-licensed inspector is required to send a copy of the septic system inspection report to Washington County within 15 days of the inspection. A copy will also be provided to the property owner and the VBWD.
 11. **What do I need to do after the inspection?** If your system was determined to be compliant, the copy of the septic system inspection report will serve as your certificate of compliance (good for 3 years) and no further action is required. If your system is determined to be noncompliant, the septic system inspection form will be reviewed further by Washington County. The County may subsequently send you a notice of noncompliance and an order to replace or upgrade the septic system.
 12. **What is the timeframe for required upgrades to noncompliant systems?** If septic system or soil treatment area components are classified as failing, homeowners have six months from the notification date to make the necessary upgrades. If the system is classified as an imminent threat to public health it must be replaced within 90 days of notification.

13. What do I do if my system is required to be upgraded or replaced? If the county orders you to upgrade or replace your system, you are responsible for the following:

- Paying a state-licensed professional to design a new/upgraded system.
- Obtaining construction bids from contractors and the cost associated with the replacement of the septic system and hiring a contractor to replace the system
- Obtaining a permit from Washington County and associated permit fees.

A list of state-certified designers and contractors is available on the Minnesota Pollution Control website: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/ssts-search>

14. What do septic system replacements typically cost? Typical residential septic system replacement costs can range from \$10,000–\$20,000, depending on the system type and size required.

15. Will financial assistance be available to upgrade or replace septic systems? Yes. Washington County has a low-interest loan program, with interest rates of 1.5–3%, available for septic-system replacement. The county also has a very limited number of grants for low-income households. See: <https://www.co.washington.mn.us/index.aspx?NID=2148>

Additionally, the VBWD has developed a cost-share program for residents within the Kelle's Creek watershed, available on a first-come first-served basis. The VBWD cost-share program will cover 25% of septic system upgrade/replacement costs, up to \$5,000, for any systems that have been inspected through the Kelle's Creek program and ordered by Washington County to be upgraded or replaced. For more information on the VBWD cost-share program and requirements, go to:

http://www.vbwd.org/KellesCreek/KellesSSTSCostShareApp_April2016.pdf

16. Where can I learn more about individual septic treatment systems?

- Washington County septic system information: www.co.washington.mn.us/septic
- University of Minnesota: <http://septic.umn.edu/>
- University of Minnesota Extension: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/environment/housing-technology/moisture-management/septic-system-owner-guide/>
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/programs/ists/index.html>

17. Who do I contact with questions about the Kelle's Creek septic system inspection/cost-share programs or the Washington County ordinance and grant/loan programs?

- For questions regarding the VBWD Kelle's Creek watershed septic system inspection and cost-share programs, please contact Jen Koehler, Barr Engineering (engineers for the VBWD), at 952-832-2750 or jkoehler@barr.com.
- For questions regarding the local septic system ordinance, contact Chris LeClair, Washington County Public Health and Environment, at 651-430-4052 or chris.leclair@co.washington.mn.us.
- For information about Washington County loans or grants, contact Kristen Scobie, Washington County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, at 651-379-9358 or kscobie@wchra.com.