But are Failing Septic Systems a Problem in Northwest Indiana?
According to the most recent soil surveys conducted by NRCS and Soil Survey Staff, approximately 80% of the Little Calumet-Galien watershed’s soil is ‘severely limited,’ likely caused by an overabundance of sand (Soil Survey Division Staff, 2012). Another 5% of the watershed has soil that is classified as ‘moderately limited’ (i.e. soil has somewhat favorable soil conditions for septic systems) (Soil Survey Division Staff, 2012).

Although the average system lifespan ranges from 11 to 30 years, half of U.S. septic systems are estimated to be more than 30 years old (Ferrell & Grimes, 2005; Siegrist, Tyler, & Jenssen, 2001). In northwest Indiana, public records about septic system locations and ages vary across the region. Public health officials estimate that many septic systems are over 20 years old and were installed before installation permits were issued by county governments.
Septic Systems are designed to function when at a minimum of 2 feet above the water table (Purdue Extension, 2005). According to LaPorte County ground water surveys, the mean depth is approximately 5 ft and has been known to reach highs of 1.5 ft (USGS, 2016).

LaPorte County Health Department is the only local department that has implemented permitting for new and repaired septic systems. An operating permit is renewed as follows:
(A) At least once every three (3) years for onsite sewage systems having components, other than a septic tank, requiring scheduled inspection and maintenance.
(B) At least once every five (5) years for all other onsite sewage systems.
(LaPorte County Health Department, 2015)
Proper septic system function relies on informed, proactive homeowners

(Halvorsen & Gorman, 2006)
Septic System Care

**Household Practices**
- Keep solids, toxics, oils and grease out of the drain
  - Fats, oils, grease
  - Harsh chemicals or cleaners, liquid drain de-cloggers, paint thinner, excessive bleach
  - Exceeding the label's recommended amount of detergent
  - Bath oils, excessive soaps
- Reduce and control water usage
  - Space loads of laundry throughout the week
  - Fix leaking sinks and toilets
  - Use high-efficiency washers, low-flow toilets and showerheads if possible
  - Don’t drain hot tubs into septic tank or onto the drainfield

**The Septic Tank**
- Perform tank pumping and maintenance
  - Have a state-licensed or Health District-certified service provider inspect your tank at least every three years—some systems require more frequent inspection
  - Learn your system type and maintenance schedule
  - Have your system pumped approximately every three years based on your inspector’s recommendation
  - Clean outlet screen yearly (if your tank has one)
  - Keep inspection and maintenance records
  - Additives to “boost function” are not recommended

**The Drainfield**
- Protect your drainfield and reserve areas
  - No structures, parking, livestock, roof drainage or runoff near the drainfield
  - No irrigation or sprinkler systems near the drainfield
  - Plant only grass or shallow-rooted plants
  - Call Snohomish Health District for a map of your drainfield

**Regularly inspect your drainfield**
- Check for odors, wet spots, or surfacing sewage
- If your drainfield has monitoring ports, check them every few weeks; ports that continually contain over six inches of water could indicate a problem

Have a problem? We’re here to help:
SNOHOMISH HEALTH DISTRICT 425-339-5250
www.pugetsoundstartshere.org/septic
Homeowners’ Knowledge & Awareness of Septic Systems and Barriers to Septic System Maintenance in Northwest Indiana: Information to Enhance Agency Outreach and Education Efforts
Participants had limited knowledge of actual septic system care and maintenance practices.

Participants relied on methods such as Rid-X (\textit{does not work}) as an adequate form of maintenance.

Participants made little to no connection with failing septic systems and public health.

Participants made little to no connection with failing septic systems and the environment.

High E.coli levels in Lake Michigan were associated with combined sewer overflows.

Participants don’t think failing septic systems are a problem in their community.

What was found
What Are We Doing About It?
Septic System Coordination Work Group

Sea Grant Illinois - Indiana

LaPorte County Health Department

Lake County Indiana Health

Indiana Department of Health

Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission

Save the Dunes

INDIANA LAKE MICHIGAN COASTAL PROGRAM
ASK: Would you be willing to participate in a survey that helps us better understand how to get the right information about septic systems into your community?
Questions?

To find out more about septic system maintenance and care, visit:

• savedunes.org/septics-awareness/
• epa.gov/septic