

Town of Meredith
Proposed Health Regulation relating to subsurface wastewater disposal systems
within 250' of Lake Waukegan
Frequently Asked Questions

1. [What is Cyanobacteria and why is it a risk to public health?](#)
2. [Why are you proposing a regulation that is more stringent than the state's regulation?](#)
3. [Will the regulation also apply to the residents of Center Harbor and New Hampton?](#)
4. [Why doesn't the town extend the town's sewer system to all lake front properties? I would rather pay for the connection to the town's sewer system than install a new septic system.](#)
5. [What about my personal freedom and property rights? This is government over-reach, an invasion of privacy, and infringement on my rights to do what I want on my own property.](#)
6. [How much time will I have to have my system inspected?](#)
7. [Why is the cost of the inspection not borne by the town if the town is going to mandate an inspection?](#)
8. [What is the town going to do if I cannot afford to upgrade my system? Will I have to tear down my home or sell it for a discounted price? Where will I live?](#)
9. [Where do I find someone to evaluate my system and how much will it cost?](#)
10. [How often should I have my septic tank pumped out?](#)
11. [If the system is used only seasonally why does it need to be inspected every 5 years?](#)
12. [Why not focus on educating the public before resorting to laws and penalties?](#)
13. [The regulation is discriminatory in that it only applies to septic systems with 250 feet of Lake Waukegan. Why not all of the watershed?](#)
14. [Why should I care about the drinking water source for Meredith? I get my water from our own well.](#)
15. [Why should I care about the drinking water source for Meredith? I live in Center Harbor or New Hampton.](#)
16. [As a downtown Meredith businessowner, how does this regulation affect me?](#)
17. [How can a homeowner tell if their septic system is not working properly?](#)

Town of Meredith
Proposed Health Regulation relating to subsurface wastewater disposal systems
within 250' of Lake Waukewan
Frequently Asked Questions

What is Cyanobacteria and why is it a risk to public health?

Cyanobacteria are microscopic organisms found naturally in lakes, streams and ponds and once known as blue-green algae, although not a plant, they are actually bacteria. They feed on phosphorus and other nutrients and can be toxic when they bloom. Lake Waukewan has had numerous toxic blooms in the past few years. If ingested, they can be fatal to animals and cause injury to humans. Boiling or killing the cyanobacteria only releases the toxins and so there is no current way to treat drinking water containing the cyanobacteria. For more information look here: <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/dwgb/documents/dwgb-4-15.pdf>.

Why are you proposing a regulation that is more stringent than the state's regulation?

The state regulation has a few shortcomings but does allow towns to pass its own health regulations in order to protect the health of its citizens. We feel that the proposed health regulation supplements NHDES's efforts with locally enforceable regulations, can be administered with existing staff, can be readily incorporated into our existing Building Permit and Public Health functions, avoids the wait-for-failure approach, and is conservative in scope and straight-forward enough so that it will be favorably considered by our neighboring communities on Lake Waukewan which control a significant percentage of the 8.1 mile shoreline.

Will the regulation also apply to the residents of Center Harbor and New Hampton?

This is a Town of Meredith health regulation and will only apply to Meredith at this time. The plan would be to ask the Town of New Hampton and Center Harbor to consider the same regulation once it is accepted in Meredith. Since Lake Waukewan is Meredith's single source drinking supply and the Meredith properties are closest to the water intake it made sense to begin with the Town of Meredith.

Why doesn't the town extend the town's sewer system to all lake front properties? I would rather pay for the connection to the town's sewer system than install a new septic system.

Meredith hired a consultant in 2008 to determine the feasibility of extending the town sewer system around Lake Waukewan and it was determined to be cost prohibitive. The study can be found on the town's website here: <http://www.meredithnh.org/pdfdocs/ws/Sewer%20Extension%20Study.pdf>. Extending sewer within the Meredith town boundary was estimated to cost more than \$18,000,000.

What about my personal freedom and property rights? This is government over-reach, an invasion of privacy, and infringement on my rights to do what I want on my own property.

The advisory committee was very sensitive to this and has always focused on education and public outreach first and foremost. We also believe for the most part people will do the right thing on their own without government intervention. However, there is a time

Town of Meredith
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and place for regulation when it comes to the overall public safety. In this instance, there is overwhelming benefit to the public in determining if there are failed septic systems polluting the Meredith drinking supply and the water in Lake Waukewan and Meredith Bay downstream. The regulation primarily focuses on determining whether the oldest systems, 50 years and older, are functioning properly and not in failure. Most systems are not even designed to last 25 years under normal conditions and these systems pre-date current technologies. In fact, these “systems” may even be cesspools as far as we know since there is no data at all on what comprises these older systems.

How much time will I have to have my system inspected?

If your system does not have a State operational approval on file and the health regulation is approved by the Board of Selectmen you would then have 2 years to have your system evaluated and certified to the Town’s health officer.

Why is the cost of the inspection not borne by the town if the town is going to mandate an inspection?

The cost of the inspection should not be a financial hardship given the 2-year phase in. If it is a hardship there are avenues for obtaining financial help including low-interest private and public loans and grants as well as the Town’s financial hardship fund which has a current balance of approximately \$15,000. The advisory committee is currently working with the Lake Winnepesaukee Watershed Association (LWWA) to submit grants to help with the cost of inspections as well as replacement/upgrades. There are no guarantees these grants will come thru however. It is important to note that your waste disposal system is just like any other part of your home, even though it is hidden underground, and that maintenance and repair is the responsibility of the homeowner. If your roof is leaking and needs repair it is up to you to have to fix it. In the case of a leaking roof however, it would only affect the homeowner or its occupant. In the case of a leaking waste disposal system alongside Lake Waukewan the affect is much broader and can affect your neighbors and others downstream.

What is the town going to do if I cannot afford to upgrade my system? Will I have to tear down my home or sell it for a discounted price? Where will I live?

If your system needs to be upgraded both the Town and NH Department of Environmental Services will do everything in their power to assist with the upgrade as this is for the benefit of not only you as the property owner but the overall public good. You would need to pump your tank and immediately work with DES to put a plan together to upgrade your system. The Town of Meredith has a very limited septic replacement fund that can be accessed if there is a financial hardship. There may also be low-interest private and public loans and grants available.

Where do I find someone to evaluate my system and how much will it cost?

There is a list of individuals who have completed course work related to system evaluations on the Granite State Designers & Installers (GSDI) website. Search under “Find a Professional” here <http://www.gsdi.org>. The cost will vary depending upon

Town of Meredith
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Frequently Asked Questions

several factors but estimates range from \$250 to \$600 depending upon the evaluator and the work required to complete a thorough evaluation.

How often should I have my septic tank pumped out?

Although mandatory tank pumping is not part of the regulation it is recommended that you regularly pump your tank out. From the GSDI website (www.gsdia.org): Do not wait until your system shows signs of failure to have your septic tank pumped out. Waiting can mean complete clogging and an expensive repair bill. The pumping schedule depends upon the size of the septic tank and the use. The smaller the tank the more frequent the pumping should be. Typical pumping schedule is between 2 and 5 years depending upon use.

If the system is used only seasonally why does it need to be inspected every 5 years?

A seasonal property typically is used 4 months each year and the long rest period allows the leach field to breakdown organic material and also allows the leach field to dry out. It is actually recommended that pre-1965 systems be inspected every 2 years since systems this old are at the end of their life cycle.

Why not focus on educating the public before resorting to laws and penalties?

The Waukewan Watershed Advisory Committee has focused primarily on education and public outreach on various topics in order to protect the quality of Lake Waukewan since our creation in 2004. The #1 risk recommendation in the 2005 Watershed Management Plan was to “Reduce nutrient, bacteria, and virus inputs from septic systems” and to “Develop and implement a septic system inspection program with the goal of this program to identify failed systems in the 250 foot shoreline zone around Lake Waukewan and Lake Winona, in order to promote system repair or replacement.”

Over the past 7 years we have had several educational and informational bulletins distributed to residents and other groups. At the same time we have been working on refining a health regulation that would bring extra emphasis on the education and outreach that has gone on before and will continue. The importance of failed wastewater disposal systems and their negative effects on Lake Waukewan led us to believe that all tools in the toolbox should be used for greatest effect.

The regulation is discriminatory in that it only applies to septic systems with 250 feet of Lake Waukewan. Why not all of the watershed?

Septic systems closest to the shoreline pose the greatest threat to water quality. Phosphorus for example does not move readily thru the soil, however, if there is a failed system within the water table of Lake Waukewan there certainly would be Phosphorus easily leaching into the Lake. Contaminants and nutrients released further from the shoreline would have a more difficult time reaching the lake unless the circumstances favored the traveling pollutants (e.g. steep slope, ledge or rocky soil, stream or other heavy runoff potential). The 250 foot setback also aligns with the State’s definition of protected shoreline in the recently updated Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act.

Town of Meredith
Proposed Health Regulation relating to subsurface wastewater disposal systems
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Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I care about the drinking water source for Meredith? I get my water from our own well.

Failed septic systems can affect more than just the surface drinking water supply in a negative way. There are pathogens and other bacteria that can travel and get in the water table and ground water which may end up in your well or your neighbor's well. Swimming and other recreational activity can also be affected by increased vegetative growth, potential for milfoil, and cyanobacteria blooms - all of which are fed by nutrients leaking from failed septic systems.

Why should I care about the drinking water source for Meredith? I live in Center Harbor or New Hampton.

All residents of all 3 towns enjoy the benefits of superior water quality in Lake Waukegan. Failed septic systems will not only affect the quality of the drinking water that Meredith uses for its public water system but there are also negative effects to all users of the lake. Whether you swim, boat, or fish in the lake the reduction in water quality will affect you. Phosphorus loading from failed septic systems is a direct factor in the increased occurrence of aquatic vegetation, algae, and cyanobacteria. Children and pets who could come into contact with toxic algae blooms on the lake surface has nothing to do with the drinking supply but is something that could affect any lake user. Lastly, the declining quality of Lake Waukegan would be detrimental to the local economy as well as the value of shorefront and other property who rely on the lake as an amenity and as a large part of the property tax base.

As a downtown Meredith businessowner, how does this regulation affect me?

The quality of the Meredith water supply should be important to you if you use water in any way to run business. If you own a restaurant or serve food or beverage to your customers, consider how a shut-down of the water supply would affect your business now as well as your future business prospects. How would the image of downtown Meredith be affected if the quality of the town water system was questioned or downgraded? Continuance of our high-quality, uninterrupted, and affordable potable water is critical to our downtown economy.

How can a homeowner tell if their septic system is not working properly?

From the GSDI website (www.gsdia.org): Sewage backing up into toilets, tubs or sinks, slowly draining fixtures; particularly after it has rained, the smell of raw sewage accompanied by extremely soggy soil over the drain field, sewage discharged over the ground or in nearby ditches or woods, and water test results indicating the presence of biological contamination or organic chemical contamination in the groundwater under the system. However a septic system failure is many times invisible, leaching underground especially on sloped properties.

Town of Meredith
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