

## **SANITARY SURVEYS: WHEN ARE THEY APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?**

### **What is a Sanitary Survey?**

A sanitary survey identifies sources of water pollution such as failing septic systems and agricultural, industrial, and commercial operations. The focus is usually on threats to water quality that may affect aquatic life or recreational use of a water body. Ideally, the survey should cover the entire watershed. Since this is not always practical, surveys often focus on areas close to the water body in question. This is particularly the case when the focus is on septic systems.

### **Why Do a Sanitary Survey?**

Maintaining clean water is important in keeping shellfish harvest and swimming areas open. While there are state standards for septic systems, not all systems comply with these standards. Surveys are an effective way to identify sites where sources of contamination need to be addressed. The survey can be followed by clean-up and mitigation measures. For example, there are grant funds available to assist income-eligible homeowners to replace their septic systems. There are also funds available to help farmers with best management practices to address erosion and related problems.

### **What Conditions Make a Sanitary Survey Advisable?**

If there are homes with older septic systems, overboard discharges, or privies, a survey might be needed. This is particularly the case if there is evidence of odor or adjacent shellfish areas have been closed. Substantial agricultural, industrial, and commercial activity in the watershed may also justify a survey.

**Where to Begin?** The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) provides technical assistance to towns interested in conducting a survey. Given the highly technical nature of the survey, it is best to work with DEP or others trained in this task (see contact information at the end of this document). It is helpful to have a group of citizens available to organize the effort locally.

Initial steps include determining what previous work has been done in the study area, contacting the DEP and the Maine Department of Marine Resources, and notifying residents. A good resource is [Municipal Guide to Clean Water: Conducting Sanitary Surveys to Improve Coastal Water Quality](#) prepared by the Maine Healthy Beaches Program (<http://www.mainehealthybeaches.org/resources.html>). This publication provides detailed guidelines on how to conduct a survey and has sample forms.

Be sure that your local plumbing inspector (LPI) is notified. LPI's have the authority to survey properties for malfunctioning subsurface wastewater disposal systems. If refused entry to a property by an owner, the town has the right to serve an administrative search warrant.

### **Whom Can We Contact for More Help?**

The Maine Healthy Beaches Program ([www.mainehealthybeaches.org](http://www.mainehealthybeaches.org)) has beach water quality data for certain coastal towns that may be useful. The Public Health Division of the Maine Department of Marine Resources ([www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public\\_health/closures/closedarea.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/closures/closedarea.htm)) has information on areas closed to shell fishing. DMR staff may be available to help conduct a survey. The DEP Watershed Division (<http://www.maine.gov/dep/land/watershed/index.html>) has technical assistance resources. It may also have information on previous surveys that have been done.

Also, feel free to contact Tom Martin (207-667-7131 or [tmartin@hpcme.org](mailto:tmartin@hpcme.org)) at the Hancock County Planning Commission you have any questions.

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