

## **PERC TEST - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **WHAT IS A PERCOLATION TEST?**

A percolation test is a soil test designed to evaluate the soil's capacity to accept a subsurface sewage disposal system (septic system). The test has two parts, the soil evaluation and the site evaluation.

### **WHY ARE PERCOLATION TESTS REQUIRED?**

Percolation tests are required under the authority of Chapter 216 of the Harford County Code entitled "Sewage Disposal Systems, Private", Paragraph 21 which states: "Percolation tests are required to determine the absorptive capacity of the soil. All percolation tests shall be performed under the supervision of the Health Department on all lots where a private waste disposal system is required. Percolation tests will be conducted in the area as designated by the approving authority. Tests shall be made in sufficient number and at such locations to assure a reliable determination of subsurface conditions."

### **How Do I Apply?**

To apply for a percolation test, the following three (3) items must be submitted together:

1. Plat plan drawn to scale. The preferred scale should be 1in.=100ft. or 1in.=50ft.
2. Check or money order made payable to Harford County, Maryland. The following fees apply:
  - a. Conventional Perc Test = \$150.00 per lot
  - b. Innovative and Alternative Test = \$150.00 per lot
  - c. Sand Mound Test = \$200.00 per lotIf you are not sure which test applies to your property, please contact our office. If you are making a repair of an existing septic system, there is no fee for the percolation test, but an application must still be made.
3. A completed application form.

### **What is the Review Process?**

After the application is submitted, it will be reviewed by the Health Department. Of particular concern is the type of soil located on the property. Certain soils can only be tested during the wettest months of the year. The normal regulatory period for testing these soils is February 1-April 30. This period is subject to change with fluctuating rainfall. If you know the type of soil that you have on your property, you can check to see if the soil must be tested during the restricted period. If the application is unacceptable for any other reason, the applicant will be notified either by telephone or in writing.

### **How Will I Be Contacted?**

If the application is acceptable, our office will contact you by telephone with our next available date and time. On this date and time, you must arrange to have a backhoe on site. If the date and time the Health Department representative arranges does not agree with you or your backhoe contractor, the Health Department representative will attempt to schedule another date for you.

### **How long is a percolation test valid?**

Results vary between properties, but generally speaking, results are good for 5 years from the date of the test. Percolation tests may also become invalid for the following reasons: locations of the tests are questionable, previous percolation tests indicate evidence of rock or groundwater, previous tests are located within or too close to an environmental feature not acceptable for septic systems (slopes, swales, streams, etc.) .

**Can my percolation test results be renewed or updated?**

Results vary between properties, but most results from 5-15 years old can be updated for a period of five (5) years. If you would like a previous percolation test to be updated, please contact the Health Department. When you call, please provide our office with the following information: address, subdivision and lot (if applicable), tax map, and parcel.

**How many percolation test holes must I dig on my lot?**

Most newly created lots require 3 percolation test holes within a designated 20,000 sq. ft. septic reserve area. All test results within the septic reserve area must be satisfactory. If unsatisfactory test results are encountered, additional testing will be required. Older lots and percolation tests for repairs to existing septic systems may require fewer than 3 satisfactory tests.

**How deep does the backhoe operator have to dig?**

The most ideal depth for the backhoe operator to have the ability to dig for a Percolation Test is 12-14 ft. deep. Although the actual percolation test itself is not actually run at these depths. The 12-14 ft. helps determine the soil conditions on the property and identify any potential problems with permeability, rock, and groundwater.

**If it is raining the day my percolation test is scheduled will the test still be conducted?**

In most instances especially during the wet season test period, the Health Department attempts to conduct percolation tests during inclement weather. If there is heavy rain, snow, ice, or freezing rain, the test will probably be rescheduled. Please try to remember that the Health Department conducts several hundred percolation tests each year; so, rescheduling may take some time.

**Why do I have to do a percolation test if I am just repairing my existing septic system?**

Percolation tests are required for repairs to existing septic systems to help the Health Department assess the best repair option for a given property. The Health Department does not charge a fee for the percolation test application for tests that are conducted for repairs to existing septic systems.

**If my property fails a conventional percolation test is it automatically eligible for a sand mound?**

If your property is an existing lot of record and meets the size requirements to install a sand mound, then your property may be eligible for a sand mound percolation test. However, in most properties that fail a conventional percolation test, only about 10% are found to be acceptable for a sand mound or alternative system.