



## INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

**Land Application of Septage for Homeowners**

*Eric J. Holcomb*  
Governor

*Bruno L. Pigott*  
Commissioner

(317) 233-0472 • (800) 451-6027

[www.idem.IN.gov](http://www.idem.IN.gov)

100 N. Senate Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46204

This document provides guidance for homeowners who clean their own sewage disposal system and land apply the septage on their own ground. Under IC 13-18-12-7, homeowners are exempt from the need to get a septage permit when cleaning out their own system. However, disposal, including land application, must be done in accordance with the law.

**Definitions:**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines **septage** as “the liquid or solid material removed from a septic tank, cesspool, portable toilet, type III marine sanitation device, or a similar system that receives only domestic septage (household, non-commercial, non-industrial sewage).”

**Land application** is defined by U.S. EPA as “the spreading of domestic septage on land at controlled rates to fertilize crops and improve the tilth of soils.”

**Treatment:**

In order to be used for land application, **septage must be treated to reduce pathogenic organisms**. Sufficient quantities of lime must be added to the septage to raise the pH of the septage to 12 or higher, and to keep it at a pH of 12 or higher for 30 minutes or longer.

**Prohibitions:**

- The contents of chemical toilets or Type III marine sanitation devices must not be land applied.
- Land application of septage is prohibited when the ground is saturated, frozen, and/or snow covered.

**Site Restrictions for Land Application:**

- The water table must be more than 3 feet from the soil surface at the time of application.
- The permeability of the soil must be slower than 6 inches per hour within the first 3 feet from the soil surface.
- Septage must be land applied evenly over the area; no spot dumping.
- Septage must be land applied so that it does not run off (move from) the area applied.
- Check the weather forecast before land applying, do not land apply when heavy rain is imminent or expected.
- Septage must not enter waters of the State, such as rivers, lakes, and streams. If it does, it is a violation subject to penalty under state law.
- Access to the site by the public must be prohibited for 12 months following land application.
- Access by animals whose products are consumed by humans must be prevented for at least 30 days following land application.

- Septage must not be applied or allowed to drain closer to the following features than the minimum setbacks indicated below:

Features of Interest	Surface Spreading
Potable water supplies	500 feet
Lakes, ponds, streams, intermittent waterways, surface water impoundments, wetlands, or other bodies of water	200 feet
Drainage inlets, tile systems, sinkholes, undrained depressions, and property lines or easements	100 feet
Residences, places of business, or public gathering places	600 feet
Public roads	300 feet
Public water supply well or public water supply surface intake structure	1,000 feet

**Crop Restrictions for Land Application:**

- Food crops for direct human consumption must not be grown for 18 months following land application.
- Food crops with harvested parts below the surface of the land must not be harvested for 20 months after application of septage when the septage remains on the land surface for 4 months or longer prior to incorporation into the soil.
- Animal feed, fiber, and those food crops whose harvested parts do not touch the soil surface must not be harvested for 30 days after application of the septage.
- Turf grown on land where septage is applied must not be harvested for 1 year after application of septage when the harvested turf is placed on either a lawn or land with a high potential for public exposure.
- Examples of crops impacted by septage pathogen requirements, as provided by U.S. EPA:

Harvested Parts Which...		
Usually do not touch the ground	Usually touch the ground	Are below the ground
Peaches, Apples, Wheat, Oats, Barley, Oranges, Grapefruit, Cotton, Soybeans, Corn	Melons, Eggplant, Squash, Hay, Tomatoes, Lettuce, Cucumbers, Celery, Strawberries, Cabbage	Potatoes, Yams, Rutabaga, Beets, Sweet Potatoes, Peanuts, Onions, Leaks, Radishes, Turnips

**Land Application Rates:**

The annual application rate for septage must not exceed the following:

- 76,000 gallons per acre based on 200 pounds of nitrogen, on land being prepared for growing corn, during the next growing season;
- 38,000 gallons per acre based on 100 pounds of nitrogen, on land being prepared for growing soybeans, wheat, or hay, during the next growing season;
- 19,000 gallons per acre based on 50 pounds of nitrogen, on land that is grass, pasture, set aside or otherwise idle for continued growth.

For more information, please contact Brenda Stephanoff at (317) 233-0472 or by email at [bstephan@idem.IN.gov](mailto:bstephan@idem.IN.gov).