



Choosing a Sewage Contractor

There are many types of private sewage systems. Each system has advantages and disadvantages. Some systems are better suited to certain site conditions than others. The Saskatchewan Onsite Wastewater Disposal Guide provides recommended selection criteria for a number of systems. The information provided for these systems is intended to allow for the adequate treatment of domestic wastewater.

When hiring a contractor, a homeowner is relying on the knowledge and skills of the contractor to provide the best onsite wastewater treatment and disposal system for the specific site and homeowner requirements.

Find qualified contractors

Start by looking for contractors that deal in private sewage systems. A good source of referrals may be a friend, family member or neighbour who has had similar work completed. In addition, you may be able to contact industry associations such as the Western Canada Onsite Wastewater Management Association.

Discuss your project with a few potential contractors to get their advice and suggestions. Some contractors may be able to give a rough estimate for the system at the time of the first meeting.

You want to find out as much as you can, so ask questions, such as:

- How long have you been in business?
- What work are you, or your subcontractors, licensed to do (e.g., electrical, plumbing)?
- What kind of work do you specialize in?
- Will you use your own crew for the work or will you subcontract all or part of the job?
- How would you handle a specific problem related to this project (e.g., installing a system in a treed area)?
- How and when do you clean up?
- What work schedule will you follow?
- What kind of warranty do you offer and what does it cover? A quality contractor will stand by their work. A permit from the local authority does not provide a warranty from the local authority.
- Do you carry workers' compensation and liability insurance? It is important to check that the contractor has current liability and workers' insurance for people on the job and damages they may cause. Without this, you as the property owner may be liable. Ask to see the contractor's insurance certificate and make sure that it is current.
- Will you provide a written estimate for all phases of the proposed work?
- Will you provide a written contract?
- Will you take out all required permits (e.g., sewage disposal permit, electrical, etc.)? A sewage disposal **permit is required** from the health region to establish, construct, extend, renovate, alter or repair a private sewage system.

For any contractors that you wish to get a quote from, be sure to:

- Ask for and check references.
- Check with the Better Business Bureau of Saskatchewan.

Specific to private sewage systems

Below are some questions for different aspects of a private sewage system construction project. Often all of the services below are provided by a single contractor but in other cases, different contractors may complete different aspects of the work.

Site investigation

- Will you be responsible for arranging for the locating of buried services?
- Does the price include an advanced site investigation or a basic site investigation? Or neither?
 - Note: A site investigation is required for all soil based onsite wastewater treatment systems.
- Will you charge us for determining where our property lines are located?
- Have you taken any training in site investigation?

System Selection, Design and Installation

- Will the design include:
 - all site visits and survey work;
 - review of the soil investigation and an opinion provided on the type of systems that could be installed along with price estimates for each one;
 - draft plans for review and approval; and
 - permit application and plan submission to the Health Region?
- If a separate contractor for the installation of the systems is used, do you provide construction oversight of the system and is this included in the price?
- Have you performed onsite wastewater work according to the most recent Saskatchewan Onsite Wastewater Disposal Guide before?
- How many systems in the last year have you submitted for approval?
- Have you taken any training in system selection and design?

Installation Contractor

- How many installations have you performed?
- How many of the proposed type have you completed in the last year?
- Are there any systems that you have worked on, or are presently working on, that have not been completed? If so, why not?
- How long will it be before you provide a written estimate, if we provide a set of plans?
- If your estimate is accepted, how long before you can start work?
- How long will this job take from start until finish?
- How long will our toilets, dishwashers, sinks, etc. be off line?
- Have you taken any training in system installation?

Remember

- It is not possible to design a specific onsite wastewater treatment and disposal system without collecting some information about the home and the soil characteristics. If a fixed price is provided prior to any data collection, you should question what the estimate is based on.
- There is no system that is suitable for all sites. The type of house, fixtures within the house, soil and lot characteristics all influence the type of system and the specific details of that system.

Ask for Quotes

There is no ideal number of quotes that are needed. It is most important to ensure that you are comfortable with the contractor you select. However, many people prefer to get three estimates in order to have enough information to be able to make an informed decision. Some contractors may separate the price into two or three stages; a site investigation; a design stage and a private sewage works construction stage.

Get a Written Document

Don't be tempted by a contractor who doesn't have an address; doesn't want a written contract or offers a discount if you pay cash. This type of transaction incurs many risks for you, the homeowner.

You should realize that private sewage systems are covered by soil upon completion. If the work is done poorly, you may not notice for several years, at which time, it may not be possible to contact the original contractor.

Consider all the project factors when selecting the successful contractor. This includes but is not limited to cost factors.

A contract between you and the contractor is recommended and should be included for all jobs.

Be aware of your responsibilities under provincial builder's lien requirements and ensure that the applicable holdbacks are retained.

Additional Information

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation provides additional information regarding renovations and choosing a contractor on their website: <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/reno/refresh/>

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Health's website provides information on the advantages and disadvantages of various private sewage systems. For more information and a link to the regulations, go to: <http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/private-sewage-systems>

For more information on this fact sheet and/or other onsite sewage system topics, contact your local health region public health inspector:

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/understanding-the-health-care-system/saskatchewan-health-regions/regional-public-health-inspectors>

References

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, (unknown). Local Septic Management - Homeowner Checklist. Retrieved November 20, 2009 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts website: <http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/wastewater/checklst.htm>

NOTE: This information was updated in October 2010. To confirm you are reading the most recent version of this document, check to see the most recent version on the Ministry of Health website.

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