

REMINDER #1:

You must have your septic system
Inspected every 3 years.



REMINDER #2:

Hire pumper
when holding
tank is full.

POWTS Handbook

Owning & Maintaining a Septic System or Holding Tank in Marathon County



Conservation, Planning,
& Zoning Department

POWTS
Private
Onsite
Wastewater
Treatment
System

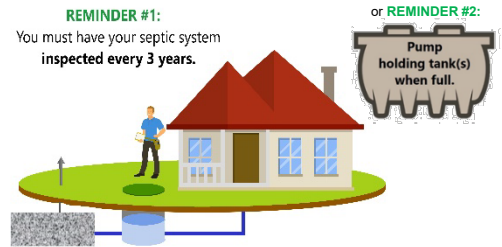
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What is the POWTS Maintenance Program?

The Marathon County Conservation, Planning, and Zoning Department (CPZ) has administered a program that requires maintenance of over 14,000 Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS) — often called “septic systems”— installed on or after July 1, 1980. Several legal changes at the State level now require that ALL septic systems & holding tanks (regardless of age) in Marathon County be maintained according to State and County ordinances — NO EXCEPTIONS.

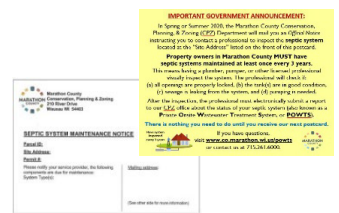
This expanded program requires property owners to have their holding tanks pumped when full or their septic tank systems maintained at least once every 3 years by having a plumber, pumper, or other licensed professional visually inspect the system to determine the condition of the septic tank and if pumping is needed. Upon completion of any inspection and/or pumping, the professional must electronically submit a report to the CPZ office for our records.



The purpose of this expanded maintenance program is to protect public health and our natural resources. It is not intended to force every property owner to upgrade or replace their private septic system. However, if an inspection report identifies a defective septic tank or any sewage discharging onto the surface of the ground, the County must then require the owner to repair or replace the system. In conjunction with this, Marathon County developed a loan program that will provide financial assistance to qualifying low-income property owners who must replace a failing POWTS. More information about this special POWTS Loan Program can be found on page 10.

So, what does the expanded POWTS Maintenance Program mean for you?

Over a 6-year period, the Marathon County CPZ Department will be mailing owners of septic systems and holding tanks that were installed before 1980 a yellow Maintenance Announcement postcard, followed by a white Official Notice, informing them how to comply with the State’s new maintenance requirements. (See Appendix A for details.)



There is no new required action for you to take until you receive these instructional postcards from the Marathon County CPZ Department.

You can simply continue to maintain and service your septic system as needed until then.

Who do I call with questions about the POWTS Maintenance Program?

The Marathon County **Conservation, Planning, & Zoning (CPZ) Department** is who has been directed by the Marathon County Board of Supervisors to administer the program that requires maintenance of over 14,000 Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS) installed on or after July 1, 1980 — as well as an additional 7,000 POWTS installed before July 1, 1980 — through the expanded POWTS Maintenance Program.



Questions?

Marathon County Conservation, Planning, & Zoning (CPZ) Department

Address: 1100 Lake View Drive, Suite 400,
Wausau, WI 54403

Phone: 715.261.6040

Web: marathoncounty.gov/powts

Email: cpz@co.marathon.wi.us

CPZ Department's Mission

The Marathon County CPZ Department's mission is to protect our community's land and environment. We promote thoughtful and deliberate use of resources to ensure that Marathon County has healthy people, a healthy economy, and a healthy environment — today and tomorrow. We help ensure that private wastewater treatment systems are functioning in a manner that provides for the property owners' needs, as well as our mission, to not only protect our surface and ground water from pollution, but to also to comply with Wisconsin Statutes and Administrative Code.

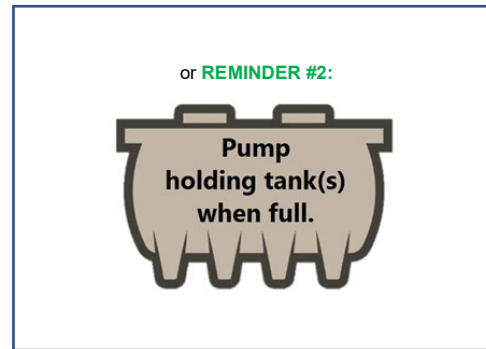
How often does my septic system or holding tank have to be maintained?

Maintenance requirements depend on the type of wastewater treatment system you have:



Septic tank system.

OR



Holding tank system.

Septic Tank Systems

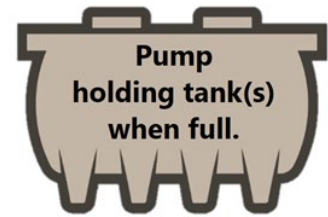
Most private wastewater treatment systems — other than holding tank systems — will have one or more septic tanks (in-ground systems and mound systems both have septic tanks). **Maintenance of septic tank systems includes a visual inspection by a properly licensed POWTS professional at least once every 3 years AND pumping of the tank(s), when necessary.** You can find lists of local professionals on our website: www.marathoncounty.gov/powts.

A visual inspection will determine whether any sewage or wastewater is leaking onto the ground, will check the condition of the tank(s), and will verify that aboveground tank covers are properly locked or secured. In addition, if the inspection finds that combined sludge and scum exceed 1/3 of the tank volume, the septic tank(s) must be pumped.

Every time a septic tank system is inspected, maintained, or serviced, a report must be submitted electronically to the Marathon County CPZ Department office by the POWTS professional on behalf of the property owner. **Reports must be submitted within 30 days of completion.** If maintenance is not reported on time, the CPZ Department will send a notice reminding the property owner that the legally required maintenance of the septic tank system is due and that the POWTS code requirements have not been met. Maintenance requirements will not be satisfied (and code violations will be in effect) until Marathon County receives the required completed report from the POWTS professional.

Holding Tank Systems

Holding tanks are only allowed in Marathon County when no other type of wastewater treatment system can be installed (for example, where groundwater is found very near the ground surface). Holding tank systems simply collect and hold the wastewater created by your home or business. Because these systems do not include any components to treat or redirect



the wastewater, **all sewage collected in the tank must be professionally pumped out and hauled away to an approved disposal site.** The frequency of pumping depends on the amount of water you use and the capacity of your holding tank. Average wastewater volume is approximately 60 gallons per person per day. Water conservation practices will help reduce pumping frequency.

Maintenance of holding tank systems involves having a Certified Pumper empty your tank each time it fills. It is NOT legal for property owners to empty their own holding tanks or to discharge

“It is NOT legal in the State of Wisconsin for property owners to empty their own holding tanks.”

any wastes, including “gray water” — that is, water from laundry, sinks, showers, and so on — onto or into the ground. Visit www.marathoncounty.gov/powts for a contact list of local Certified Pumpers. A visual inspection will determine whether any sewage or wastewater is leaking onto the ground, will check the condition of the tank, and will verify that aboveground tank covers are properly locked

or secured for health and safety reasons. It is the property owner’s responsibility to be sure that covers remain in place and locked or secured to prevent unauthorized access.

The date, number of gallons pumped, and name of the pumper must be reported to the CPZ Department. In fact, every time a holding tank system is inspected, maintained, or pumped, a report must be submitted electronically to the CPZ Department’s office by the POWTS professional on the property owner’s behalf. **Reports must be submitted within 30 days of completion.** If maintenance is not reported on time, the CPZ Department will send a notice reminding the property owner that the legally required maintenance of the holding tank system is due and the property owner has not met the POWTS code requirements. Maintenance requirements will not be satisfied (and code violations will be enforced) until Marathon County receives the required completed report from the POWTS professional.

Who can inspect, maintain, or service my septic tank or holding tank?



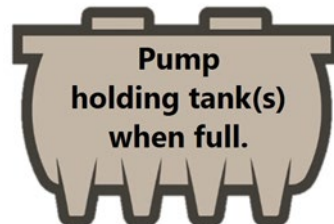
Septic Tank Systems

For septic tank systems, the following are acceptable licensed or certified professionals:

- **Master Plumber**
- **Journeyman Plumber**
- **POWTS Inspector**
- **POWTS Maintainer**
- **Certified Septage Servicing Operator (Certified Pumper)**

Visit www.marathoncounty.gov/powts to find contact lists of local Plumbers, Certified Pumpers, POWTS Maintainers, and other licensed professionals.

or **REMINDER #2:**



Holding Tank Systems

For holding tank systems, the following are acceptable professionals:

- **Certified Septage Servicing Operator (Certified Pumper)**

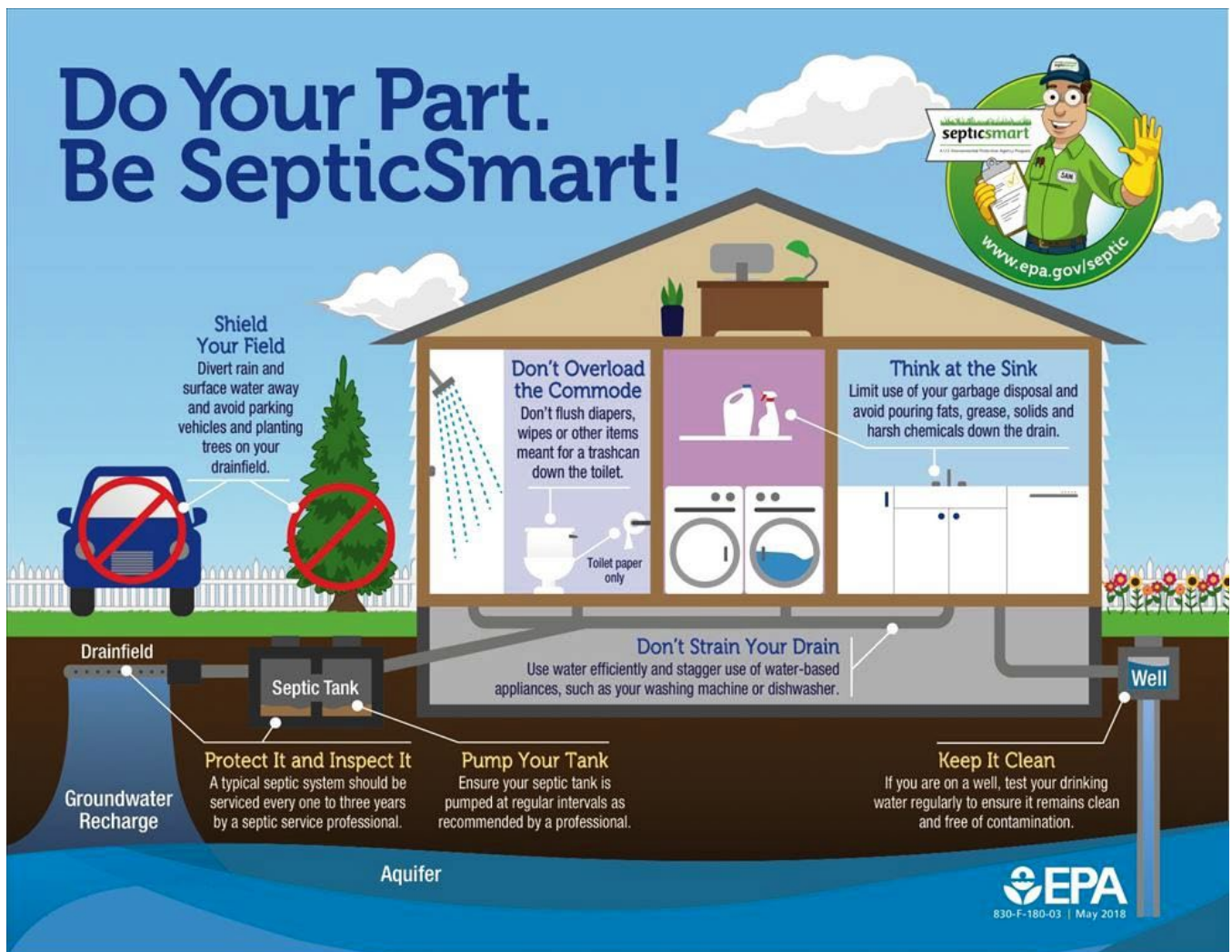
Visit www.marathoncounty.gov/powts for a contact list of local Certified Pumpers.

What tips do you have for me to properly care for and use my septic tank?

In addition to mandatory POWTS Maintenance Program requirements regarding scheduled inspections and pumping, proper care and use of a septic system will help keep it functioning properly and extend its life. Here are several helpful tips on septic system care and use.

DO:

- ✓ Limit the amount of water entering your system: Use water-saving fixtures, practice water conservation, and fix any leaks, dripping faucets, or broken toilet float valves.
- ✓ Divert rain water and roof water so it drains away from your septic system.
- ✓ Discharge gray water to the system. (Gray water includes wastewater from sources such as laundry, sinks, and showers.)



DON'T:

- Connect footing drains (such as drain tile) to the system.
- Flush or put materials down drains that may clog the system (for example, grease, fats, coffee grounds, paper towels, dental floss, cotton swabs, feminine hygiene products, condoms, diapers, cigarette butts, or kitty litter).
- Put toxic substances (such as cleaning fluids, oils, paints, disinfectants, pesticides, or mercury) in drains, as they might damage the system or end up in the groundwater.
- Use caustic drain openers for a clogged drain. Instead, use boiling water or a drain snake to open clogs.
- Drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system. Doing so can compact the soil in your drainfield or damage the pipes, tank, or other septic system components.
- Plant trees or shrubs on or near your septic system. Roots from these might clog and damage the drainfield.
- Allow water softener backwash to enter your septic tank without checking with your local regulatory agency or inspector/pumper first.
- Use too much commercial-grade bathroom cleaner. Many people prefer to clean their toilets, sinks, showers, and tubs with a mild detergent or baking soda instead.

A Note About Additives...

It is not recommended to use chemicals or additives to clean or “sweeten” your system. These products do not eliminate the need to pump or maintain your system. “Starters” are not necessary for new systems or after pumping existing systems. While there is no accepted test method to prove septic tank additives work or don’t work, some products are actually harmful. In Wisconsin, all additives must be reviewed by the Department of Safety & Professional Services prior to sale for proof that they will not harm the user, bacterial action in the system, soil absorption, or groundwater quality.



If you choose to use an additive, be sure the product has Department of Safety & Professional Services approval.

How do I know if I qualify for financial help if my septic system or holding tank must be replaced?



Together, Marathon County and MCDEVCO developed a revolving loan program to provide financial assistance to low-income residents if an inspection finds that a failing septic system or holding tank is beyond repair and must be replaced. The low-interest loan program began January 1, 2020, and will be available to those most in need to help offset some of the cost of replacing a failing POWTS with repayment due at the time of sale or transfer of the property. Further details can be found below.

Marathon County & MCDEVCO's POWTS Loan Program

Eligibility Requirements

For the POWTS:

- The failing POWTS must have been installed before July 1, 1980.
- The POWTS failure must be verified by the Marathon County Conservation, Planning, & Zoning (CPZ) Department.
- Replacement of the POWTS must be required due to discharge of sewage to the ground surface or due to an issue with the septic tank's integrity.

For the Applicant:

- The loan applicant must be the property owner.
- The property owner must occupy the dwelling as their principal residence (**seasonal or rental properties are not eligible**).
- The total income of all property owners must be less than \$45,000.00 (**adjusted gross income from Federal tax returns**).

GETTING STARTED...

1. Hire a POWTS professional to **submit a POWTS Maintenance Report, Existing POWTS Evaluation Report, or Soil Evaluation Report** to the Conservation, Planning, & Zoning (CPZ) Department (see contact information below) identifying the failure of an existing POWTS.
2. Contact the CPZ Department to request that they verify the failure and that they **complete "Part I: Failing POWTS" of the POWTS Loan Program Verification Form**.
3. Contact MCDEVCO (see contact information below) to make an appointment to **submit your completed POWTS Loan Program Verification Form** and to **complete a loan application**.

This page provides only a brief overview of the Marathon County – MCDEVCO POWTS Loan Program. For additional information, please contact either **CPZ** or **MCDEVCO**:

Is YOUR POWTS eligible for the
POWTS Loan Program?

Marathon County CPZ Department
1100 Lake View Drive, Suite 400, Wausau, WI 54403
715.261.6000 • cpz@co.marathon.wi.us

Are YOU eligible for the
POWTS Loan Program?

MCDEVCO
1415 Merrill Ave., Ste. 140, Wausau, WI 54401
715.298.0084 • info@mcdevco.org

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The Basics

Q. What is a POWTS?

POWTS is an acronym for Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System, commonly referred to as a “septic system.” The term *POWTS* refers to all types of private sewage systems, including conventional, at-grade, mound, holding tank, and other types of systems.

Q. I don't have any idea what type of POWTS I have or where it is located. What should I do?

If your POWTS was installed after July 1, 1969, the CPZ Department may have a permit record that could provide some helpful information. If there is not a permit record for your system, you should contact a POWTS professional and request assistance in locating and identifying your POWTS.

Q. What is the objective of the POWTS Maintenance Program?

The maintenance program is intended to ensure that all POWTS are functioning properly and to protect our ground and surface water, in the interest of public and environmental health.

Maintenance Announcement Postcard / Official Notice

Q. How will I know that it's time to maintain my POWTS?

If maintenance has not already been reported by a licensed professional to the County, the Marathon County CPZ Department will mail a postcard to you (or to the property owner if you are not the owner) reminding you that maintenance is due.

Q. Do I need to wait until I receive a notice from the Marathon County CPZ Department to have my POWTS maintained?

No. You may choose to have your POWTS maintained at any time before receiving a reminder notice from the County. If your maintainer reports this maintenance, your due date will be reset from that date. If you always maintain and report before the due date, it is possible that you will never receive a notice from the County.

Q. I have received a notice from the County indicating that maintenance of my POWTS is due. What should I do?

That depends which system you have. If you have a:

- **Septic tank system**, you should hire a licensed Master Plumber, Journeyman Plumber, POWTS Inspector, POWTS Maintainer, or Certified Septage Servicing Operator (Certified Pumper) to have maintenance completed. Visit www.marathoncounty.gov/powts for contact lists of POWTS professionals in Marathon County).

- **Holding tank system**, you should hire a Certified Septage Servicing Operator (Certified Pumper) to have the tank(s) pumped. Visit www.marathoncounty.gov/powts for a contact list of Certified Pumpers in Marathon County.
- **Pre-treatment system**, you should hire a certified POWTS Maintainer to have your system maintained. Visit www.marathoncounty.gov/powts for a contact list of POWTS Maintainers in Marathon County.

Within 30 days of each maintenance, your POWTS professional must file a report electronically to the CPZ Department on your behalf. Maintenance requirements have not been satisfied (and code violations will be enforced) until the County receives the required completed report from your POWTS professional.

Q. I have received a notice from the County but my tanks were pumped recently. Do I need to pay a professional to do this again?

Notices you receive from the CPZ Department are based on the date of the last maintenance report received, so it's possible that your POWTS professional has simply not reported the recent maintenance yet. If you have a:

- **Septic tank system** and maintenance was completed within the last 3 years, you should contact the POWTS professional and request that they submit a maintenance report. When the report is received, your next due date will be reset to be 3 years from the latest maintenance date.
- **Holding tank system**, it commonly requires pumping on a frequent basis. If you receive a notice and your tank(s) were pumped within the last 4 months, you should contact your pumper and request that they submit a maintenance report. If it has been more than 4 months and your tank(s) still are not full, you should contact the CPZ Department to discuss this.
- **Pre-treatment systems** commonly require maintenance every 6–12 months. If you believe that maintenance was completed at the interval required, you should contact your POWTS Maintainer and request that they submit a maintenance report to the Marathon County CPZ Department.

Q. I have received a POWTS Maintenance Program postcard or letter from the County, but don't believe there is a POWTS on my property. What should I do?

You should contact the CPZ Department to discuss this. You can reach them via email at cpz@co.marathon.wi.us or phone at 715.261.6040 or schedule an appointment to speak with someone in person at their office located at 1100 Lake View Drive, Suite 400, Wausau. If CPZ confirms that there is no POWTS on your property, you will be removed from the maintenance program.

Q. I have received a POWTS Maintenance Program postcard or letter from the County, but do not have any plumbing and use an outhouse or privy. What should I do?

You should contact the CPZ Department to discuss this. You can reach them via email at cpz@co.marathon.wi.us or phone at 715.261.6040 or schedule an appointment to speak with someone in person at their office located at 1100 Lake View Drive, Suite 400, Wausau. If CPZ confirms that there is no plumbing in the buildings and that the buildings are served by a compliant privy, sanitary permit records will be revised to show a privy exists and you will not be required to provide maintenance reports.

Maintenance Reporting

Q. How can I tell if maintenance of my POWTS has been reported to the County?

Visit ascent.co.marathon.wi.us/ascentlandrecords and then follow the instructions in Appendix B to view the latest maintenance history for your system.

Q. Can I send a copy of my invoice or receipt to the CPZ office as proof of maintenance?

No. All maintenance reports must be submitted electronically to the CPZ office by the licensed professional completing the maintenance.

Q. I have a seasonal dwelling (or other building) that is only occupied occasionally. Do I still need to maintain and report on my septic tank system every 3 years?

Yes. Inspection is required every 3 years; however, if the system has had very limited use, it's quite possible that pumping will not be needed that frequently. When contacting a POWTS professional for maintenance, you may explain that this is a seasonal dwelling and request that they determine whether pumping is needed at this time.

Q. Do I still need to maintain and report on my POWTS if it is in a vacant building?

If the building is vacant (this means no occupancy at all, it does not mean limited or low usage), you should contact the CPZ Department to discuss this. You can reach them via email at cpz@co.marathon.wi.us or phone at 715.261.6040 or schedule an appointment to speak with someone in person at their office located at 1100 Lake View Drive, Suite 400, Wausau. If CPZ determines that it is vacant, you would not be required to maintain your POWTS at this time, but would receive another notice the following year.

Q. My POWTS was inspected for a real estate transfer recently. Do I still need to maintain and report on my septic tank system?

There is no requirement for submittal of real estate evaluation reports to the County, so it is common for maintenance associated with these to go unreported. You should contact the POWTS professional completing the real estate evaluation report to determine whether the work they completed for the real estate transfer will satisfy maintenance program requirements and, if so, request that they report this maintenance for you to the CPZ office.

Q. Why did my POWTS professional pump my septic tank even though it didn't need it yet?

While septic system maintenance is always required every 3 years, it may not be necessary to pump the tank that often. Pumping is only required when the combined volume of sludge and scum in a septic tank occupy more than 1/3 of the total tank capacity. When maintenance of your septic system is due, you should contact a POWTS professional to inspect it. During the inspection, you may wish to ask the professional to determine if pumping is needed. If not, the professional can indicate this on the report submitted to the County. The professional may still suggest to pump it as a matter of convenience, but it is not required at that time.

Problems After an Inspection

Q. What if an inspection finds a problem with my POWTS?

If a maintenance report identifies a problem (such as a missing lock, defective tank, or discharge of sewage to the ground surface), the CPZ Department will contact you to explain how to resolve the problem and to establish a timetable for doing so.

Q. I know my POWTS discharges sewage to the ground. Do still I need to pay someone to inspect it?

A POWTS that discharges to the ground surface is a failing system. You would not be required to have the system maintained if you hire a POWTS professional (such as a Certified Soil Tester or Master Plumber) to start the process of obtaining a sanitary permit and installing a replacement POWTS. It is important, however, that you notify the CPZ Department that you have started this process and then keep them informed of your replacement progress.

Q. What if I can't afford to replace my failing POWTS?

There are currently a few sources, including Marathon County's POWTS Loan Program, which are designed to provide financial assistance for low-income property owners. Basic information about the Marathon County POWTS Loan Program can be found on page 10 of this handbook. More information is available at www.marathoncounty.gov/powts or by contacting the CPZ Department via email at cpz@co.marathon.wi.us or phone at 715.261.6000, or schedule an appointment to speak with someone in person at their office located at 1100 Lake View Drive, Suite 400, Wausau. The CPZ Department can also provide information about other sources of financial assistance.

Pre-Treatment Devices

Q. My septic tank system has a pre-treatment device. What do I need to do to maintain it?

Some wastewater treatment systems include a pre-treatment component (such as an aerobic treatment unit or a sand filter), to improve the quality of wastewater discharged from the system. These pre-treatment systems are commonly part of a septic system, so property owners will need to do both septic system AND pre-treatment maintenance. There are a small number of pre-treatment systems in Marathon County, each with unique maintenance requirements, which are commonly called for every 6–12 months and must be completed by a certified POWTS Maintainer. (Visit www.marathoncounty.gov/powts for a contact list of POWTS Maintainers in Marathon County.) NOTE: Owners of most pre-treatment components are required to maintain a servicing contract with their POWTS Maintainer. If you believe you may have a pre-treatment component, please contact the Marathon County CPZ Department for details on the specific maintenance requirements. You may reach out via email at cpz@co.marathon.wi.us or phone at 715.261.6000, or schedule an appointment to speak with someone in person at their office located at 1100 Lake View Drive, Suite 400, Wausau.

Other Questions?

For additional information or questions, please call the CPZ Department at 715.261.6000, email cpz@co.marathon.wi.us, or visit our website at www.marathoncounty.gov/powts.

Appendix A: Timeline of POWTS Rules & Regulations Changes

The timeline below offers a glimpse into the changing rules and regulations surrounding this expanded POWTS Maintenance Program.

1969

Marathon County adopts Private Sewage Systems ordinance
(Chapter 15 of the General Code of Ordinances for Marathon County)

“to promote and protect public health and safety by assuring the proper siting, design, installation, inspection, and management of private sewage systems and non-plumbing sanitation systems, and to assure the timely repair or replacement of failing private sewage systems.”

Available at:

https://www.co.marathon.wi.us/Portals/0/Departments/CPZ/Documents/privsew2_19_2019.pdf



1980

Marathon County starts a POWTS Maintenance Program that applied only to septic systems or holding tanks installed *after July 1, 1980* (which, according to CPZ records, number approximately 14,000 throughout Marathon County).



October 1, 2019

The State sets this deadline for counties to BEGIN the administration of the expanded POWTS Maintenance Program, which will take 6 years to implement.

As such, the Marathon County Conservation, Planning, & Zoning (CPZ) Department began adding septic systems and holding tanks installed before 1980 to its POWTS Maintenance Program. **Each year thereafter, approximately 1,000 septic systems and holding tanks will be added, starting with those properties bordering surface waters (such as lakes or streams) and then progressing to properties located farther from surface waters.**

This process of gradually expanding CPZ’s POWTS Maintenance Program to include ALL septic systems and holding tanks in Marathon County is expected to continue until 2025.

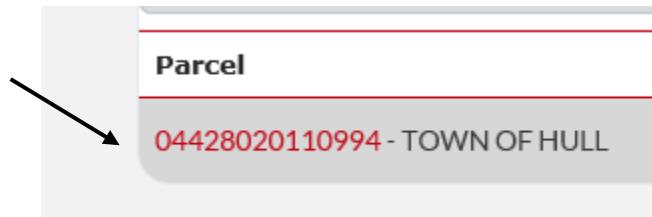
NOTE: Since 2000, changes to Chapter SPS 383 in the Wisconsin Administrative Code (available at http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/sps/safety_and_buildings_and_environment/380_387/383.pdf) now require counties to include ALL septic systems and holding tanks — regardless of age — in the POWTS Maintenance Program (which, according to CPZ’s records, added approximately 7,000 septic systems and holding tanks to Marathon County’s POWTS Maintenance Program).

Appendix B: Instructions for Viewing Sanitary Maintenance Reporting

Visit the Marathon County Land Records website at: ascent.co.marathon.wi.us/ascentlandrecords.

1. Type in your Parcel ID, Street Number, Street Name (minus St., Rd., Dr., etc.), First Name, and/or Last Name.

2. Click on your parcel number in red.



3. Click on Permits in the Select Detail dropdown list, and click on the Permit # in red. (Select View Interactive Map to see photos, wetlands, natural features, and more.)

Permit #	System Type	Issued Date	Last Service Date
2000-SAN-0253	Holding Tank	6/30/2000	12/19/2019

4. Click on the Maintenance dropdown menu. This is where you will be able to see the service dates for any Maintenance Reports.

Service Date	Filed Date	Gallons	Maintenance Company	Filed By	Action
12/19/2019	12/21/2019	4000	STEINER SEPTIC	STEVE STEINER	
6/19/2019	6/19/2019	4000	STEINER SEPTIC	Admin	
12/27/2018	12/27/2018	4000	STEINER SEPTIC	Admin	
5/21/2018	5/21/2018	4000	STEINER SEPTIC	Admin	