Homeowners have a role to play in protecting Nova Scotia's drinking water and environment.

Nearly half of the homes in our province use wells for drinking water and septic systems for sewage. About 240,000 homes have heating oil tanks.

It is important that you as a homeowner ensure these systems are installed and looked after properly, and tested regularly. This protects your health and your pocketbook. Septic fields or home oil tanks that don't work properly can affect your drinking water and the environment, and cost a lot of money to clean up. We're all better off when these systems work correctly from the start.

You can get free information from Nova Scotia Environment and our partners. Call 1-866-500-3427 for details, or visit **www.gov.ns.ca/nse/hap/**. Our local offices and website also have information for homeowners on drinking water, sewage and oil tank safety.

Hire a Certified Professional

It's the law for certain jobs to be done by people who are trained and certified to do them. Before you hire someone, ask them to show proof that they are certified to do the work. That way, the work is far more likely to be done right the first time. Wells and septic systems that are not installed or maintained properly can allow bacteria into your drinking water. This puts the health of you, your family and your neighbours at risk.

Jobs requiring a professional certified by Nova Scotia Environment include:

- Well drillers, diggers and pump installers
- Septic system installers and cleaners
- Applying and selling pesticides

Lists of people who are certified to do this work can be found at **www.gov.ns.ca/nse/resources/licence.certification.listings.asp** or by contacting your local Nova Scotia Environment office.

Homeowners' Guide

How to protect our drinking water, the environment and your pocketbook

NOVA SCOTIA

Wells

If you have a well for drinking water, you need to be sure it is properly constructed by a certified professional. You also need to test the water regularly for natural or man-made impurities that can be harmful to your health.

You should test your well water every six months for bacteria such as *E. Coli*, and every two years for chemicals such as arsenic.

For more information for homeowners who use wells, including tips on proper care and testing, visit **www.gov.ns.ca/nse/water/privatewells.asp** or your local Nova Scotia Environment office.

Septic systems

Wastewater, or sewage, is any water used in the home including for washing or flushing your toilet. An on-site septic system treats and disposes of sewage. This usually includes a septic tank and a field that work together to treat wastewater.

When these systems are properly designed, installed, used, and cared for, they are affordable, reliable and safe and can last many years. However, if a system is poorly designed, installed, used, or cared for, it could leak harmful bacteria into your drinking water supply and harm the environment. It can also affect the health of people who live near you.

While bacteria in the wastewater will break down some of the materials, septic tanks must be pumped regularly to remove the solids and scum that are not broken down. Otherwise both the sludge and the scum can foul the disposal field. How often you must have the tank pumped depends on the size of the tank, the number of people using the system and the percentage of the wastewater that is solid waste. An average family of four would need their tank pumped every 3 to 4 years.

In the past, some homes have used pipes that run raw sewage into the environment like a river or lake. These straight pipes are not a legal way to dispose of wastewater, and if your home has one, you need to replace it with a properly working septic system right away.

For more information on septic systems visit **www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wastewater/on.site.sewage.disposal.asp** or your local Nova Scotia Environment office.

Oil tanks

Oil tanks can store heating oil safely for several years if they are installed correctly and if you take proper care of them. If you use an oil tank, you need to check the outside of the tank for rust or signs of damage; protect the tank from weather, plants and anything else that might damage it; and have your heating system and oil filters checked each year by a certified company.

Half of the oil tank leaks in Nova Scotia happen when water on the inside or outside of the metal tank causes rust that weakens the tank. Non-metal tanks do not rust and they are far less likely to leak than metal tanks. When the time comes to replace your tank, consider choosing a non-metal tank.

For more information visit **www.gov.ns.ca/nse/petroleum-domestic/** or your local Nova Scotia Environment office.

Oil Tank System Checkup

- ❏ Does the tank have a tag showing it has been constructed to meet national standards?
- ❏ Is the tank free from visual signs of damage?
- ❏ Do the vent and fill pipes exit your home in the case of an inside installation?
- ❏ Is the fuel filter located inside the home?
- ❏ Is the tank fully above ground (no partially buried components)?
- ❏ Has fuel been transferred from an old tank to a new tank?

If you answered "No" to any of the first five questions and/or "Yes" to question six your system is at a higher risk for leaking and should be checked by a professional.

- ❏ Is the tank shell thickness greater than 14 gauge steel?
- ❏ Is the tank less than 15 years old?
- ❏ Does the tank have a bottom feed outlet?
- ❏ Is the tank installed inside?
- ❏ Has the tank been installed vertically?
- ❏ Does the oil line run on top of the basement floor?
- ❏ Does the tank have a vent whistle or alarm?
- ❏ Is the tank equipped with an outlet valve/line protector?
- ❏ Is the tank equipped with an oil-level gauge protector?
- ❏ Is the tank equipped with an anchoring device?
- ❏ Is the tank painted with a corrosion resistant coating?
- ❏ Does the tank have an internal corrosion resistant coating?
- ❏ Do you routinely remove any water/sludge buildup in the tank?
- ❏ Is the system equipped with secondary containment or leak detection devices?
- ❏ Do you have a maintenance service agreement with your oil provider?

Each "No" you answered to the questions above increases the risk of your oil tank leaking.