

# *City of Jamaica*

## *On-Site Septic System Management Program*

*December 2007*

The town of Jamaica was the first in this area, and possibly the first in Iowa, to choose a special type of treatment system. Most towns have central collection pipes and a series of sewage lagoons to treat their waste. Jamaica has all on-site septic systems consisting of septic tanks and lateral fields. These systems are managed by the County Environmental Health Dept. under an agreement reached with the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) and the town.

In 2000 the DNR discovered that the town's septic tanks were connected to tile lines and discharged into the creek running through town. Obviously, this was not only illegal but a very unhealthful arrangement. A plan was required to correct this situation.

The City Council, after being contacted by the County Environmental Health Dept., had good foresight to consider a plan that would cost the City's residents about 1/3 the cost of hiring an engineer and developing a typical city collection system. Many residences already had proper on-site systems so the plan was to require all other residences, businesses, churches, etc. to upgrade the septic systems to pass requirements.

This five-year plan was agreed to by the DNR and it was begun in the July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002 year. The Council decided to progress by tiers of blocks beginning with the north end of the town and completing the project at the south end in the July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006 year. The town is now completed with all systems in compliance.

For those systems now installed it is important for maintenance to be performed. So the County will walk over each system each TWO years to check the observation ports, look for bleeding out of sewage, and be sure there is no construction, etc. on the system. Then each FOUR years the tank is opened to see if pumping is needed. By pumping the tank when needed, the life of this system will be greatly prolonged.

There is a charge to the City for this County inspection program that is required by the DNR. Currently the City charges \$1.00 per month on each water service to pay the cost of this program. Now that all systems are in and the inspection program is in full swing, this cost may go up a dollar or two. Compared to what people pay in most towns for a monthly sewer bill, this is negligible.

When the inspections are done, homeowners are notified of any problems discovered or if the tank does need to be pumped. Homeowners are given 30 days to complete the work and notify this Dept. Failure to do so does result in legal action by the Board of Health.

The Environmental Health office has a brochure that gives a more detailed explanation of the history and development of this Management Program. Contact this office to receive this brochure.

Other sites of interest on this topic:

Septic System Grants & Loans  
Percolation test  
Septic System Permits