



Frequently Asked Questions about the Bay Restoration Fund’s Septic Upgrade Program in Cecil County

A conventional onsite septic system was never designed to remove nitrogen. The average residential onsite sewage system discharges approximately 40 pounds of nitrogen per year. For residences in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area (land within 1000’ of a tidal body of water), up to 80% of this nitrogen can reach surface waters where it contributes to degradation of the Chesapeake Bay. Even away from the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, some nitrogen from septic systems will eventually reach the groundwater and surface waters. The Bay Restoration Fund provides financial assistance for upgrading onsite septic systems with nitrogen reducing technology. Grants are administered in Cecil County by the Cecil County Health Department.

- 1. What is a “Best Available Technology” (BAT) nitrogen reducing system?** These treatment systems have been field verified by Maryland Department of the Environment to reduce nitrogen release to the environment from septic systems by 50%. They replace the conventional septic tank with a multi-chambered tank along with some form of aeration. Different manufacturers use different methods of accomplishing the treatment, but they all require an electrical connection and regular maintenance. Some form of drainfield is still required.
- 2. How is the nitrogen reducing system installed?** To retrofit an existing septic system, the existing septic tank is typically pumped and removed. The new treatment unit is installed between the house and the existing drainfields, frequently at the same location as the old septic tank. Because the treatment unit is slightly larger than the old septic tank and must have access for maintenance, there are some site-specific situations where the tank must be relocated. Maryland law requires that after January 1, 2013, installers of BAT units be certified by both MDE and the manufacturer of the treatment unit.
- 3. What determines if a septic system is “failing” for purposes of this program?** Maryland Department of the Environment has defined what is considered a failing septic system for Bay Restoration Grant eligibility. This includes septic systems which are discharging to the ground surface, systems that have been identified as contaminating a drinking water supply, a damaged septic tank that must be replaced, or a system which has failed a private septic system certification. Grants from the Bay Restoration Fund will pay for the nitrogen reducing system, but does not pay for drainfields or other septic system components which may be required for the repair.

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|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|-----------------------|
| ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES..... | 410-996-5550 | ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES..... | 410-996-5160 |
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| EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS..... | 410-996-5113 | MENTAL HEALTH AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS SERVICES..... | 410-996-5112 |
| COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES..... | 410-996-5130 | TTY USERS FOR DISABLED: MARYLAND RELAY..... | 800-201-7165 |
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4. **Why is a percolation test required by the Cecil County Health Department?** Nitrogen reducing treatment systems must still be connected to an onsite drainfield. If onsite soil conditions are not suitable for an onsite drainfield, upgrade of the septic system is accomplished by installation of a sewage holding tank, where sewage generated on the property must be pumped and hauled to Seneca Point Sewage Treatment Plant. Seneca Point Sewage Treatment Plant is designed to remove more nitrogen than an individual treatment unit. Most houses built after 1980 would have a percolation record on file in our office that would satisfy this requirement. Older houses may need to have a percolation test done. Contact the Cecil County Health Department to discuss the percolation status of your specific property.

5. **How much of the cost of the nitrogen reducing system does the Bay Restoration Fund sewage system upgrade program pay for a failing septic system in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area?** All grants are based on use and income. Grants for residences owned by individuals will be based on the chart below. Non-profit corporations are eligible for 100% funding. A residence owned by a business, corporation, or LLC and all other grants are capped at 50%.

6. **Will the Bay Restoration Fund septic upgrade program provide grants other than for a failing septic system in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area?** Grants are decided based on the following priority ranking, in accordance with MDE grant conditions:

- Priority 1** **Failing septic systems in the Critical Area**
- Priority 2** **Failing septic systems outside the Critical Area**
- Priority 3** **Nonconforming septic systems in the Critical Area**
- Priority 4** **Nonconforming septic systems outside the Critical Area**
- Priority 5** **Elective and new construction in the Critical Area**
- Priority 6** **Elective and new construction outside the Critical Area**

The Cecil County Health Department is required to ensure that adequate funds are available to provide grants for failing septic systems in Cecil County’s Chesapeake Bay Critical Area. Near the end of each grant quarter, if the Health Department is confident that sufficient funds are available, grants may be awarded for lower priorities. Grant demand for higher priorities must be satisfied before lower priority grants can be issued. For residences owned by individuals, use the table below and your 2015 Federal Tax Return to determine the grant subsidy you are eligible for. You will need to submit a copy of your Form 1040 in a separate sealed envelope for review by our fiscal officer. Please do not send any schedules or attachments with the Form 1040. Feel free to blacken out your social security numbers. For new construction homes, see special requirements in note #7 below. For a residence owned by a business, corporation, or LLC, or for nonresidential uses, the subsidy is capped at 50% of eligible costs.

| % Septic BAT Grant Subsidy | Any filing status Total Household Income (\$) (Line 22 of Form 1040) | |
|----------------------------|--|---------|
| | over | up to |
| 100% | 0 | 300,000 |
| 50% | 300,000+ | |

7. **What requirements exist for new construction homes?** For building permits issued after January 1, 2013, all new homes in the Chesapeake Bay watershed are required to use nitrogen removal technology. This covers all of Cecil County **except** the area that is both east of Appleton Rd and north of I-95. Grants for new construction homes are based on the cost difference between a conventional septic system and the upgraded system. The eligible costs for a septic system upgrade listed at MDE's website includes the cost of pumping and removing the existing septic tank and other costs which are not relevant for new construction. For this reason, the eligible cost is reduced by \$1200.00 for new construction grants. If the property is currently owned by you, you will need to submit a copy of your Form 1040 in a separate sealed envelope for review by our fiscal officer. If the property is in the name of the builder or developer, grants are capped at 50% of the reduced eligible costs. ***The Bay Restoration Fund cannot issue a grant for installation of a BAT unit on a vacant lot. The dwelling must be at least 50% constructed to be eligible for a grant, and the BAT unit must be installed within 60 days of the issuance of the grant.***
8. **Where do I get information on the nitrogen reducing technologies that are approved by Maryland Department of the Environment?** Testing and approval of technologies is ongoing. The most current information is available at Maryland Department of the Environment's website http://www.mde.maryland.gov/programs/Water/BayRestorationFund/OnsiteDisposalSystems/Pages/Water/cbwrf/osds/brf_bat.aspx . This site contains information on electrical costs, maintenance costs, and nitrogen removal efficiency. We encourage the public to review the information on this site and the websites of the manufacturers to educate themselves regarding the differences between the systems. Feel free to contact the vendors listed at MDE's website, or a Health Department representative to ask questions about the units.
9. **When should I apply for a Bay Restoration Fund grant?** Contact our office when you are within 60 days of the estimated installation date. If you are near the end of a fiscal year, we will let you know how to proceed based on your proposed date of installation. In Cecil County, units must be installed within the same fiscal year that the grant is applied for. Grant conditions and eligible pricing changes at the end of fiscal years. Fiscal years run from July 1 to June 30. In addition, systems must be installed within 60 days of receiving a grant. This is to prevent money from being tied up in grants for systems that are not being installed.
10. **How do I get started?** Contact a representative of the Cecil County Health Department
 - By phone: 410-996-5160
 - In our office: 401 Bow St, Elkton, Maryland (near the Elkton Armory)