

Planning a Septic Social

*Based on materials developed by the organization 'Protect Kittery Waters'
www.protectkitterywaters.org, adopted by Vermont Lake Wise
<https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/lakes-ponds/lakeshores-lake-wise>*

Create an Organizing Team

To do:

♦Select a Homeowner Host, meeting location, and set a date. Consider setting a rain date as well. There should be a good amount of parking and a place to set up tables and chairs for 12 – 15 guests. The homeowner must be willing to share information about their septic system. (The Drinking Water and Ground Water Protection Division --1-800-823-6500-- can help provide information about the type of system, size and layout if a state permit was issued to install the system.)

♦Make an Invitation list. You will probably need to send out 40-50 invitations to get 12 -15 folks signed up. Watershed associations, other local environmental groups, and property tax maps can help you develop your list.

♦Select a "Co-Host" to interact with the homeowner and coordinate the Social.

♦Identify and Schedule Two Speakers.

1. Lake Leader – Ideally, this is someone from the lake association, or another local environmental group that can make a local connection to water quality protection. They don't need to be able to answer every question but should be knowledgeable about the local area and local resources.

2. Septic System Specialist – see The Resource List to help find a specialist in your vicinity. Ask them to arrive 30 minutes early so that they have time to set out flagging around septic system components.

Experts from companies offering pump-out services are more likely to be willing to open the holding tank for the group and will have the equipment to do so. Design experts probably will not open the holding tank. If your expert is willing to open the tank, it's best to locate and open it once before guests arrive. It saves time and prevents surprises during the actual presentation. Close the cover again so that your expert can demonstrate how to safely open it for an inspection. Make sure that you discuss necessary safety precautions and provide a place for guests and your expert to clean up afterwards.

Plan a couple of displays (or tables with literature handouts) for attendees to browse through as time allows. Consider party favors or door prizes for guests (samples of detergents and soaps, pump-out reminders, a local product...)



Timing

5 Weeks Out

- Co-host confirms the **date** and **time** of the Social with the homeowner, providing them with a written outline of what is planned. The co-host also reviews the **agenda** and **invitation** with the homeowner again to be sure everyone has the same expectations for the Social.

Note: consider giving the host/hostess a small thank-you gift, to be presented on the day of the social.

- The organizing team reviews the invitation list, gathers **email and/or snail mail addresses** for the social and **designs the invitation**.

4 Weeks Out

- Print invitations, include directions. Print a few extras. Include RSVP contact information.

3 Weeks Away

- Send invitations out.
- Get displays and outreach materials organized, including a “resource package” for each attendee.

7-10 days before

- Check RSVPs. Consider calling those who haven’t responded or sending out additional invites.
- Check in with the host/hostess. 1. Confirm they know where the components of their septic system are located, and 2. How they want to serve a snack at the Social. 3. Decide who is providing the food and beverage. 4. Designate someone to bring name tags to event. 5. Confirm the literature or displays are good to go.
- Confirm with the two presenters and make sure they have directions to the Social. Find out if they will need any support materials (electricity, easels, tables etc)

Day of social

- Set up food, literature table, and flag the septic system components ahead of event time.
- Co-host helps greet arrivals with host. Have everyone wear a name tag and sign in.
- Point guests to the food and the displays.
- Keep the agenda moving smoothly and assist the presenters as needed.
- Hand out resource packages after the presentation and encourage guests to fill out feedback forms
- Help clean up when social is over.

After Social

- Send thank you note to host(s).
- Send follow-up email to attendees a month to six weeks following the social to see how they may have used the information they heard.

Supplies

Name tags

Markers

Sign-in sheet and pen

Clipboard

A Resource Package for each guest

Display materials (including information about your watershed group)

Feedback forms and pens

Snack Food

Party favors or door prizes, if you decided to have them

To mark the septic system:

Flagging, stakes, 50ft tape measure



Information for your Septic Social Host

Template Letter:

Dear Homeowner,

Thank you for volunteering to host the Septic Social on Saturday, July 1st at 11:00am. ([Introduce your presenters here](#). For example –Joe Anderson is our technical advisor for the Spruce Lake Watershed Improvement Project, for the evening. Joe is very knowledgeable and gives a good overview of the water quality issues facing Spruce Lake. Carrie Smith works for PEP Septic and will help us learn about septic systems. As part of the social we'd like to open the holding tank and show it to everyone. If this is okay with you, Carrie will call you and ask some questions about your system.).

We hope that at least 12 neighbors and/or others from around the area will attend and learn about the importance of a well-maintained septic system. You and I can discuss what you would like at your social in terms of snacks and drinks as we get closer to the date. We do have a budget to help with the food and drink. I'll call or email you the week before to discuss the particulars.

Guests are scheduled to arrive at 11:00am. They will have an opportunity to get something to eat, browse through displays or talk to neighbors, then settle down to hear the speakers around 11:15am. The whole event from set up to clean up should be 2 hours. The agenda is:

- 10:30am: team arrives to set up displays and food, flag septic system components, and prepare for guests
- 11:00am: guests arrive and have an opportunity to get a bite to eat and view displays
- 11:15am: the local Lake Leader welcomes everyone and makes the presentation on water quality protection
- 11:30am: the septic specialist gives their presentation and walks the group through the septic system components. As the homeowner, feel free to provide information during this time as well.
- 12:30: discussion before the local Lake Leader closes the formal part of the social, hands out resource packages and asks for feedback. Guests fill out the feedback and can browse displays before leaving.
- 1:00pm: breakdown and clean-up.

I have also attached an invitation. Please look it over for any errors and let me know if corrections are necessary. We will get them printed and into the mail.

Thanks so much. We are looking forward to an informative and interesting evening.

Hope to hear from you soon.

[Co-host contact information](#).

Septic Social Invitation Example

Spruce Lake Needs You!

Septic systems are not usually a topic of polite conversation but we're here to change that! Living around Spruce Lake, we understand the value of good water quality. As residents, there are things that we can do to protect the water in our neighborhood. Proper maintenance of septic systems is an important way that homeowners do just that. Please join us for a Septic Social and learn about care and maintenance of your septic system.

We'll have two experts to talk about water quality protection and how we can keep our septic systems lake-friendly. We will also have an opportunity to look at an active system and learn how to identify problems that may occur. You'll get to ask questions and receive a packet of information to take home with you. Information on other water quality protection opportunities will be available and there will be some great snacks as well.

We all love Spruce Lake. Proper septic system maintenance not only protects Spruce Lake, it can save you money and the headache of emergency repairs. Please join us to learn more.

PARTY DETAILS:

Date:

Time: 10:00am

Your Host:

Location:

RSVP

Sponsored by the [Your organization contact information here.](#)

For more information, please visit www.xxxxx



Sign In Sheet

Thank you for joining us! Please sign in and let us know if you'd like to become a member of the Spruce Creek Association - membership is free and you'll receive news on activities and opportunities to get involved in the watershed.

Name	Address	Phone	Email	Become a member?

Septic Social Attendees Follow-up Email

Hello,

The Septic Team for the Spruce Lake Watershed Association would like to thank you all for coming to learn about septic systems.

You can and do make a difference. Help us protect the Spruce Creek watershed by

- **Being informed about Spruce Lake water quality.** Visit our website for current and past information: www.xxx and <https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/lakes-ponds> (Vermont DEC, Lakes and Ponds Section).
- **Getting your septic tank pumped and inspected regularly.** Regular septic tank pumping and inspection will prolong the life of your septic system and protect your leach field. Keep in mind that a septic tank costs less than \$300 to pump but replacing your leach field costs \$6-15,000. The condition of your leach field can also affect the resale of your property. In the meantime use water efficiently, reduce your waste load by spreading out high water use activities, don't use a garbage disposal, and, if necessary, consider a composting toilet or similar alternative.
- **Following the Do's and Don't's outlined in the Septic Smart handout.** Simple actions - like composting instead of using the garbage disposal - will lighten the load on your system and keep it healthy and functioning.
- **Getting 12 friends and neighbors together and hold your own septic social** if one has not been held in your neighborhood (call [xxx](http://www.xxx) or email xxx to learn more).
- **Making more changes on your property that can help Spruce Lake.** Even the smallest home and yard changes can make a big difference along your waterfront and possibly save you money. Visit the Vermont Lakes and Ponds Lake Wise Program to learn more <https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/lakes-ponds/lakeshores-lake-wise>

Again, thanks so much for your interest and support,
Your name and contact information

Resource Package Materials (suggestions)

- Vermont's [Lake Wise Septic System Primer](#) (the basics)
- Copy of EPA's [Septic Smart](#) brochure
- Vermont's [Lake Wise Shoreland Best Management Practices](#)
- Your watershed association's brochure
- A septic maintenance reminder
 - Customize a septic maintenance reminder or create your own
 - Washington State has an excellent collection of posters, factsheets and bookmarks that you can customize for your association. Check out the toolkits list on the left side of the page http://www.ecy.wa.gov/washington_waters/othermaterials.html