



New Mexico Environment Department

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT, PRESERVING THE ENCHANTMENT

Liquid Waste (Septic Tank) Program

Protect Your Family From Illegal Cesspools April 26, 2012

Cesspools are excavations or other leaky structures in the ground that are used to dispose of raw sewage. Cesspools are dangerous, particularly to young children, and have been illegal in the State of New Mexico since 1973. At least three children and two adults in New Mexico have fallen into cesspools, and died from drowning or asphyxiation, most recently in April 2011. Cesspools also can contaminate water wells by allowing untreated sewage to seep into the aquifer. Cesspools that are no longer being used must be collapsed and filled with dirt. Owning property with a cesspool is a crime, punishable by up to 6 months in jail and/or hundreds of dollars in fines.

Do You Have a Deathtrap in Your Back Yard?



Despite the deadly hazards posed by cesspools, and the risk of prosecution, many cesspools still exist in New Mexico.

Amnesty Until October 1, 2012

NMED will not seek civil or criminal prosecution of homeowners who have cesspools on their property, provided that they contact NMED by October 1, 2012 to correct their violations. On or after October 2, 2012, homeowners who have a cesspool on their property will be subject to enforcement.

What To Do If You Have a Cesspool

Call the NMED Liquid Waste Program at 505-827-2345 or 1-800-219-6157 (toll free) and tell us you want to get rid of your cesspool. If your cesspool is no longer being used, you will need to destroy it. If your cesspool is still being used, you will also need to apply for a permit to install a modern onsite wastewater system.