



Department of Health

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Health Department Initiative Helps Prevent Environmental Problems and Saves Water

Brewster, NY—Earth Day 2017 is over and Earth Month is ending. However, protecting the environment is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year responsibility and springtime brings a special challenge. Melting snow and April showers saturate the ground and rates of septic failures typically rise as a result. This spring the Putnam County Department of Health is launching a pilot program that may prevent some of these failures from happening by offering homeowners free toilet leak detection tablets and easy-to-follow instructions.

“Preserving our wonderful Putnam County environment is always a priority,” says County Executive MaryEllen Odell. “It fosters a healthy community and in this case, it also helps residents on an individual level. This new program saves water, and by uncovering hidden leaks, it has the potential to save homeowners thousands of dollars that it would cost to replace a septic system.”

“Many residents may not realize that septic system failures are a public health hazard, with the potential to cause serious illness, injury or even death,” explains interim Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD. “Unfortunately, the number of required septic repairs continues to increase as older systems reach the end of their useful life. The health department oversees a variety of septic-related activities including approving repair permits, licensing and training repair contractors and responding to septic complaints so that the public is adequately protected.”

Homeowners interested in participating in the pilot program can stop by the health department

to pick up the tablets and instructions, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Summer hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) They will be asked to provide an email address so that a short follow-up survey can be emailed. The tablets are dropped into the tank of a toilet. If the non-toxic dye leaks into the bowl without a flush, it indicates a leakage.

“The problem is you can’t always hear a leak,” says Robert Morris, PE, MPH, director of environmental health services at the health department. “Most people are familiar with the noise a toilet makes when it is ‘running,’ but this only occurs when a large enough amount of water escapes. You can have a smaller leak that you can’t hear, and it can still cause a septic failure.”

If a leak is detected, an inexpensive, \$15 kit to replace the flush-valve assembly can be purchased at a hardware store. Either the homeowner or a plumber can replace it, potentially averting a much larger and more expensive problem.

For advice or more information about the program, call the health department at 808-1390, or visit the office at 1 Geneva Road in Brewster.

The Department of Health’s mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit the PCDOH website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health or visit the social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth, and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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