NEW BRUNSWICK EXCAVATION

Septic & Wells

The dig side of septic jobs for licensed installers, test pits, and the well contractor rules

4 Expert Answers from Dig IQ

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Q1

Does the septic need an inspection before it is covered near Sussex?

Yes, the installed system must be available for inspection and approval by a provincial inspector before it is covered. That is a hard stop, not a courtesy call.

What the province requires

Under the On-site Sewage Disposal System Regulation, the licensed installer applies to the province for design and location approval before any work starts, and a provincial inspector assesses and approves that application first. Once the system is in the ground, it stays uncovered until a provincial inspector has seen it and approved it. Within ten days after covering, the licensed installer must give you the installation plan and operating instructions. These approvals sit with Technical Inspection Services under Justice and Public Safety, not with the local building department.

The licensed installer handles the application and the inspection request. An excavation contractor can dig the tank hole and the field trenches when the licensed installer arranges it, but the installer is the licence holder. You cannot install your own system, and an excavation contractor cannot install one either.

Near Sussex, we found no excavation-specific municipal rule beyond what the province sets for septic. For anything the Town of Sussex adds on top of the provincial process, check directly with the town.

A few things worth confirming before work starts:

- Ask the licensed installer to show you the provincial approval of the design and location before the machine arrives.
- Ask the excavation contractor to show the Info-Excavation locate ticket and the NB Power locate confirmation. NB Power's request goes in at least five business days ahead and is separate from Info-Excavation's three-working-day request.
- If the dig site is within 30 metres of a watercourse or wetland, a Watercourse and Wetland Alteration permit from the province is required before any ground is disturbed. Measure from the top of the bank in the field, not from a map.
- Under the Construction Remedies Act, you must retain 10% of the contract price as a holdback for 60 days after substantial performance.

Worth keeping in one folder: the provincial design and location approval, the inspection sign-off from the provincial inspector, the installation plan and operating instructions the installer gives you, both locate tickets, any WAWA permit, and the written quote and final invoice, because those documents are what you reach for if a question about the system comes up years from now.

Q2

Does a septic replacement need a licensed installer in Miramichi?

Yes, provincial law requires it. Under the On-site Sewage Disposal System Regulation (2009-137, made under the Public Health Act), anyone who installs, constructs, repairs or replaces a conventional septic system in New Brunswick, or carries on that business, must hold a provincial conventional sewage disposal system licence. That rule applies in Miramichi the same as anywhere else in the province.

The licensed installer, not the homeowner, applies for provincial approval before any work begins. The application covers the system design and location, soil conditions from a test pit inspection, separation distances and a flow estimate, and carries a $150 application fee. A provincial inspector must assess and approve the application before the installer may proceed. Once the system is in the ground, it must be left available for a provincial inspector to approve before it is covered. Within ten days of covering, the installer gives the homeowner the plan and operating instructions. These steps are set by the regulation; skipping any of them is not a matter of preference.

An excavation contractor can play a real role here. A licensed installer often brings in an excavator to dig the test pits, the tank hole and the field trenches. That is legitimate. What an excavation contractor cannot do is install the system itself or act as the licensed installer. If someone quotes you a septic replacement without mentioning a licensed installer or a provincial approval, that is worth a direct question before you go further.

On cost, published price guides read in September 2026 put excavation alone for a septic job at roughly $3,000 to $12,000, and a full conventional system at $10,000 to $25,000. Those are national figures; few New Brunswick prices are published, and Miramichi-specific figures were not found. Machine time is the best-published figure: a mini excavator with operator runs $65 to $150 per hour, and a standard excavator with operator runs $150 to $250 per hour. What moves the number on a septic dig is soil type, how far the spoil has to travel, whether rock is encountered, and how much material needs to come back in as backfill.

A few things to confirm before work starts:

- Info-Excavation (Click Before You Dig) requires three working days' notice; request it before any digging, including test pits.
- NB Power runs a separate underground locate service, with at least five business days' notice required; it covers only NB Power-owned lines and is valid for 60 days from the date on the locate form.
- Private lines, old tanks and field lines the owner or a past owner installed are the owner's to find and mark.
- Ask for a WorkSafeNB clearance certificate from any contractor before work starts.
- Under the Construction Remedies Act, hold back 10% of the contract price for 60 days after substantial performance.

The province's on-site sewage pages sit under Justice and Public Safety's Technical Inspection Services; ask the installer for their licence and the approval before work starts.
Before signing anything, ask the excavator exactly how rock will be priced if the machine hits it, and whether haul distance and backfill material are included or billed separately.

Q3

Do I get paperwork after the septic is covered in New Brunswick?

Yes. Under the On-site Sewage Disposal System Regulation, the licensed installer must give you the installation plan and operating instructions within 10 days after the system is covered.

That handover is not optional and it is not the installer's courtesy. The Regulation places the obligation on the licensee. Keep them with your property records.

What happens before the covering matters just as much

Before any soil goes back over the installed system, a provincial inspector must have the opportunity to assess and approve it. The province's on-site sewage program sits under Justice and Public Safety's Technical Inspection Services. The province's on-site sewage program requires the system to be available for a provincial inspector's approval before it is covered.

The excavation side of the job fits into this sequence. A contractor can dig the test pits, the tank hole and the absorption field when the licensed installer arranges it, but the installer holds the licence and carries the approval process. An excavation contractor does not install the system, and a homeowner cannot install their own.

A few other things worth knowing before the machine arrives:

- The licensed installer applies for design and location approval first, paying a $150 application fee, and work cannot start until a provincial inspector has assessed and approved that application.
- Info-Excavation requires three working days notice before digging; submit that request, and separately request NB Power's underground locate service at least five business days ahead. NB Power's locate is valid for 60 days from the date on the locate form and covers only NB Power-owned lines. Private lines, old drains and buried tanks the owner or a past owner put in are yours to find and mark before the machine moves.
- If the dig is within 30 metres of a watercourse or wetland, measured horizontally from the top of the bank, a Watercourse and Wetland Alteration permit from the province is required before any ground is disturbed. The application fee is $25 for a single alteration.

- Ask the contractor for a WorkSafeNB clearance certificate before work starts. Under the Construction Remedies Act, you must retain 10% of the contract price as a holdback for 60 days after the certificate of substantial performance is signed or the declaration is made.

Before you sign a quote for the excavation portion, ask the contractor exactly how rock will be priced if the machine hits it, because that line is where a final bill can part ways with the estimate.
Local excavation contractors listed in the New Brunswick Construction Network directory can receive your project details through the request form on this page.

Q4

What is a septic test pit in New Brunswick and who digs it?

A septic test pit is a hole dug so the soil on a lot can be examined before a septic system is designed. In New Brunswick, under the On-site Sewage Disposal System Regulation, a licensed installer must apply for approval before any system is built, and that application must include soil conditions gathered from a test pit inspection.

Who digs the test pit

The licensed installer is the person who applies for approval and arranges the work. An excavation contractor can dig the test pit when the licensed installer organizes it. The contractor does not install the system and does not apply for approval; that responsibility stays with the installer. A homeowner cannot install their own septic system under the regulation.

Ask the licensed installer what the pit needs to show and when it can be backfilled.

Before any machine moves on the lot, locates are needed. Info-Excavation, reached through Click Before You Dig, asks for three working days' notice; the locate is valid until the end date written on the request. NB Power runs its own separate underground locate service and asks for at least five business days' notice; that locate is valid for 60 days from the date on the locate form and covers only NB Power-owned underground power lines. Private lines, such as wiring to a garage or outbuilding, are the owner's to find and mark before digging starts.

If the lot is within 30 metres of a watercourse or wetland, a Watercourse and Wetland Alteration permit from the province is required before any machine work or ground disturbance. That distance is measured horizontally from the top of the bank in the field, not from a map.

On cost, few New Brunswick prices for test pit digging alone are published. Machine time is the best-published figure: a mini excavator with operator runs $65 to $150 per hour, and a standard excavator with operator runs $150 to $250 per hour, based on published price guides read in September 2026. For the full excavation side of a septic job, published guides show a range of $3,000 to $12,000, though that figure is national with no Atlantic breakdown.

Ask for a WorkSafeNB clearance certificate before the contractor starts; it confirms the business is registered and in good standing with its workers' compensation account. Under the Construction Remedies Act, hold back 10 percent of the contract price for 60 days after substantial performance is certified.

With more than one bid in hand, check whether each one names how rock is priced if the machine hits it, where the spoil goes and who pays trucking, what backfill material is used to close the pit, and whether site clean-up is included, because those four items are where quotes that look similar on the surface can end up far apart. The form on this page can send your job details to excavation contractors listed in the New Brunswick Construction Network

directory.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by New Brunswick Excavation. It does not constitute professional advice. Always book your locates, check with your municipality or Regional Service Commission, and follow WorkSafeNB rules before starting any excavation project. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **newbrunswickexcavation.com** for the latest answers.