

# TECH TALK

## USEFUL INFORMATION RELATED TO SEPTIC TANKS

### What good is a warranty?

Some septic tank producers are offering long term warranties to entice customers. What do the manufacturer's warranties actually say?? Phrases such as "Manufacture's Defect", "If in our sole judgment", and at "our option to replace, refund, or repair" may not be a realistic warranty for the homeowner after all.

Be very wary of warranties that require you to follow complicated installation instructions or suffer a voided warranty. Most of these call for special backfill, installed in compacted lifts, while the tank is progressively filled with water (to avoid collapse). If the septic tank is that delicate, what do you expect to happen the first time it is pumped? Some weak warranties anticipate collapse and even specify that you can never, ever, pump the tank completely dry!

Concrete septic tanks have to be installed correctly as well. But aside from a bedding of stone or gravel and being set level, the process is not complicated. Bed it, set it, and backfill it with the same soil excavated (but not if it is mud or full of boulders or simply garbage material). ***The structure is the engineered component — not the backfill process.*** Concrete tanks are strong enough to withstand the soil loading required of them, whether full or empty.

Concrete septic tank producers are local businesses. Contractors and installers develop long relationships with the precaster who stands behind his product. If there is a problem, you can deal with him directly, and expect immediate response. Every one of them has had occasions where a customer needs his help, and because of their local relationship, the help is given without reserve.

In New York, only Architects and Engineers can design on-site systems. This means ***they are responsible*** for oversight on every aspect of the system, including the proper installation of the septic tank.

### What good is Performance Testing?

Every tank listed under the PCANY Certification program is built to last. This program requires that manufacturers design, manufacture, and test tanks to withstand at least 7" of vacuum without leakage or collapse. ***Look for the embedded Red Disk;*** it is your guarantee that the septic tank is structurally sound, easy to install (without fear of collapse), and will operate leak free.

*From McGraw Hill Construction Mail Newsletter, 8-17-06, by Dr. Patricia D. Galloway: Engineers need to understand the risks and liabilities before proceeding with any design and to recognize the appropriate standard of care. Nothing, including warranties, will ever substitute for hard work.*



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This is part of a series of commentaries related to septic tanks, whose goal is to inform. We welcome your participation, assistance, suggestion or complaint, as long as it is consistent with our stated objectives – to inform, instruct, assist or correct common misconceptions.

The Precast Concrete Association of New York (PCANY) is an organization of over 100 members. It has 31 concrete producers, 17 of which produce concrete septic tanks, and comprise the Septic Tank Group. Our mission is to assure the physical integrity and satisfactory performance of septic tanks for the benefit of all who depend upon on-site wastewater treatment systems and the groundwater resources of the State of New York by demonstrating the unique attributes of concrete to achieve long-term goals of the public and the regulatory community. To successfully achieve this mission, PCANY will:

1. Establish a “Manufacturers Certification Program”, including a Quality Control/Quality Assurance component, with a goal to produce and deliver precast concrete septic tanks that are watertight, are designed with a structural capacity appropriate for the installation, and which exhibit a high level of quality within all related manufactured products and their accessories, throughout New York State.
2. Interact with the regulatory community and all related public agencies to develop standards for the siting, installation, monitoring, maintenance, management and operation of all components of an on-site wastewater treatment system. This goal shall be further advanced by the publication of “Concrete Septic Tank Installation Guidelines.”
3. Act on behalf of all PCANY members through participation on or presentations to committees and boards or at other venues, where the unique attributes and importance of the concrete septic tank in the on-site management of wastewater are subjects of discussion, be they at the state, county or municipal level.

### PCANY SEPTIC TANK GROUP PRODUCING MEMBERS

Binghamton Precast & Supply, Binghamton, NY 607-722-0334  
Burnett Concrete Products, Inc., Wolcott, NY 315-594-2242  
Butts Concrete Products, Masonville, NY 607-265-2887  
Concrete Building Supply, Plattsburgh, NY 518-563-0700  
R. Deso, Inc, Champlain, NY 518-298-8411  
Eastern Precast Co., Inc, Brookfield, CT 203-775-0230  
The Fort Miller Co., Inc, Schuylerville, NY 518-695-5000  
Grimm Building Materials Co., Troy, NY 518-272-1100  
Guardian Concrete Products, Schenectady, NY 518-372-0080  
Jefferson Concrete Corp., Watertown, NY 315-788-4171  
Keeler Vault Co., Inc., Hudson, NY 518-851-6281  
Kistner Concrete Products, East Pembroke, NY 585-762-8216 \*\*  
Lakelands Concrete Products Inc, Lima, NY 585-624-1990  
Oneonta Block, Oneonta, NY 607-432-6641  
Sunnycrest Inc., Auburn, NY 315-252-7214  
Woodard’s Concrete Products, Inc., Bullville, NY 845-361-3471  
Zeiser Wilbert Vault, Elmira, NY 607-733-0568

\*\*additional locations in East Bethany, Lockport, Springville, Clifton Springs, and Jamestown

The PCANY website, [www.pcanyc.org](http://www.pcanyc.org) identifies the plants that have qualified under our Certification Program, and lists the specific tanks authorized to cast in the “PCANY LISTED” red disk, which means they have been properly designed, manufactured, and vacuum tested for water tightness.