



# EnviroTrack

## Tracking the Environment and Public Health in Your Community

Fall 2025

# NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION MONTH

## September is National Food Safety Education Month: Protecting Health Starts in the Kitchen

Every year, **48 million Americans** suffer from foodborne illnesses, resulting in approximately **128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths**. That's why September is more than just the start of fall—it's **National Food Safety Education Month (NFSEM)**, a time to spotlight the simple steps we can all take to keep our food safe and our families healthy.

### Why Food Safety Matters

Whether you're a home cook, a restaurant professional, or a parent packing school lunches, food safety is everyone's responsibility. The good news? Preventing foodborne illness is easier than you think. The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommend following the **Core Four**

#### Practices:

- **Clean:** Wash hands, surfaces, and produce thoroughly.
- **Separate:** Avoid cross-contamination by keeping raw meats away from ready-to-eat foods.
- **Cook:** Use a food thermometer to ensure foods reach safe internal temperatures.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate promptly—never leave perishables out for more than two hours.



### Myth Busting & Smarter Safety

This year's theme encourages us to challenge common myths—like the idea that freezing kills bacteria (spoiler: it doesn't)—and embrace smarter food safety habits. The FDA's "New Era of Smarter Food Safety" initiative is helping modernize how we handle, store, and prepare food at every level.

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- Health Literacy Month

## Get Involved

Here are a few ways you can participate in NFSEM:

- **Educate others** - The best thing you can do to celebrate National Food Safety Education Month is by spreading awareness about food safety and good food habits. You can talk to your friends, family, and colleagues.
- **Clean your food** - One of the impactful ways in which you can take part in National Food Safety Education Month is by starting to clean your food. Be it fresh tomatoes, avocados, or apples, wash them before you eat them.
- **Share your story** - If you're someone who has some experience or knowledge about food safety, you can share your story as well as the do's and don'ts of food safety through social media and let the world know.



To learn more about food safety, visit these sites:

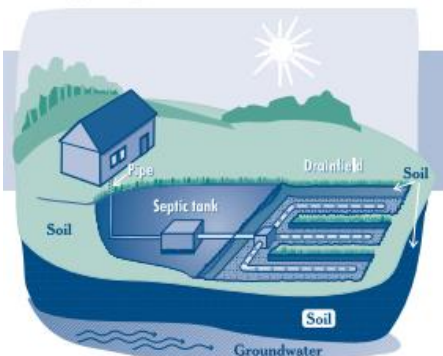
- The Marion County Public Health Department's (MCPHD) [Food & Consumer Safety website](#) includes information on food establishment inspections in Marion County, food safety regulations, and licensing information.
- You can find educational materials and information on high risk foods on the CDC's [Food Safety webpage](#).
- Check out these [7 tips](#) on cleaning your fruits and vegetables from the FDA.
- To find information on recalls, emergency response, and food safety research, visit <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety>.
- Check your ready-to-eat food safety knowledge with [this quiz](#) from FDA.gov!

# SEPTIC SMART WEEK

Mark your calendars for September 15-19! [SepticSmart Week](#) is an annual event held by the EPA to help create awareness of the importance of maintaining a septic system. Here are some tips to keep your septic system running smoothly:



- **Think at the Sink.** Everything that goes down your drain can affect your septic system. Scrape fats, oils, and grease (FOG) into your trash can instead of flushing them down the sink. Use your garbage disposal sparingly. Avoid flushing non-degradable items like wipes, menstrual products, and dental floss. Some medications and chemicals can kill the natural bacteria that live in your septic system to break down waste; dispose of [unwanted medications](#) and chemicals through a [ToxDrop program](#).
- **Don't Strain Your Drain.** Conserving water reduces the load on your septic system. Fix leaky faucets and toilets, install high-efficiency fixtures, and spread laundry loads throughout the week.
- **Keep it Clean.** The EPA recommends having your septic system inspected every 3 years by a [licensed professional](#) and pumped every 3-5 years. This prevents the buildup of solids that can clog your system and cause failures.



Typical onsite wastewater treatment system

- **Shield Your Field.** Your drainfield is where the soil filters and treats wastewater. Protect it by not parking or driving on it, planting trees and shrubs a safe distance away, and ensuring that roof drains and sump pumps direct water away from it. Don't build patios or other structures over your drainfield or other parts of your system.
- **Protect It and Inspect It.** Keep the components of your septic system, like the tank and drainfield, accessible for inspections and maintenance. Know the location of your system to prevent accidental damage during landscaping or construction activities. Regular inspections can catch potential issues early, saving you from costly repairs. Keep records of inspections, maintenance, and pumping.
- **Don't Overload the Commode.** Your toilet is not a trash can. Flushing non-biodegradable items can clog your septic system and lead to failures. Only flush human waste and toilet paper. Educate your family and guests about what can and cannot be flushed to avoid unnecessary damage.

To learn more, visit [MCPHD's Onsite Sewage System website](#).

# FALL CLEANUP WITHOUT THE SMOKE: HEALTHIER WAYS TO HANDLE LEAVES

As the leaves begin to fall, many of us face the seasonal chore of yard cleanup. While burning leaves might seem like a quick solution, it comes with serious consequences for our air quality and health.

## Why Leaf Burning Is Harmful

Burning leaves releases harmful pollutants like:

- **Fine particles (PM2.5)** that worsen asthma and heart conditions.
- **Carbon monoxide**, a dangerous gas that can cause headache, dizziness, and nausea.
- **Toxic chemicals** like volatile organic compounds and carcinogens.

These pollutants don't just disappear—they linger in the air we breathe, affecting children, seniors, and anyone with respiratory issues. Plus, leaf fires can easily spread, posing a real fire hazard.

## Smarter, Cleaner Alternatives

This fall, consider these eco-friendly options:

- **Mulch your leaves** with a mower to nourish your lawn.
- **Compost them** to create rich soil for gardens.
- **Use city leaf pickup services** if available.
- **Insulate garden beds** with shredded leaves.
- **Recycle naturally** by moving leaves to wooded areas.



## Local Leaf Disposal Resources in Indianapolis

If you're looking to responsibly dispose of your yard waste, here are some local services that can help:

- [Citizens Transfer Station](#) – City-run facility for residential waste drop-off.
- [GreenCycle](#) – Accepts leaves directly during normal business hours. There are several locations around the Indy area. Plastic bags are not accepted. Leaves brought to GreenCycle are composted.
- [South Side Landfill, Inc.](#) – Accepts yard waste and offers landfill services on Kentucky Ave.

## Take Action

Let's keep our neighborhoods clean and our air breathable. Skip the burn pile and choose a better way to manage your leaves this fall.

# RODENT CONTROL FOR THE HOME

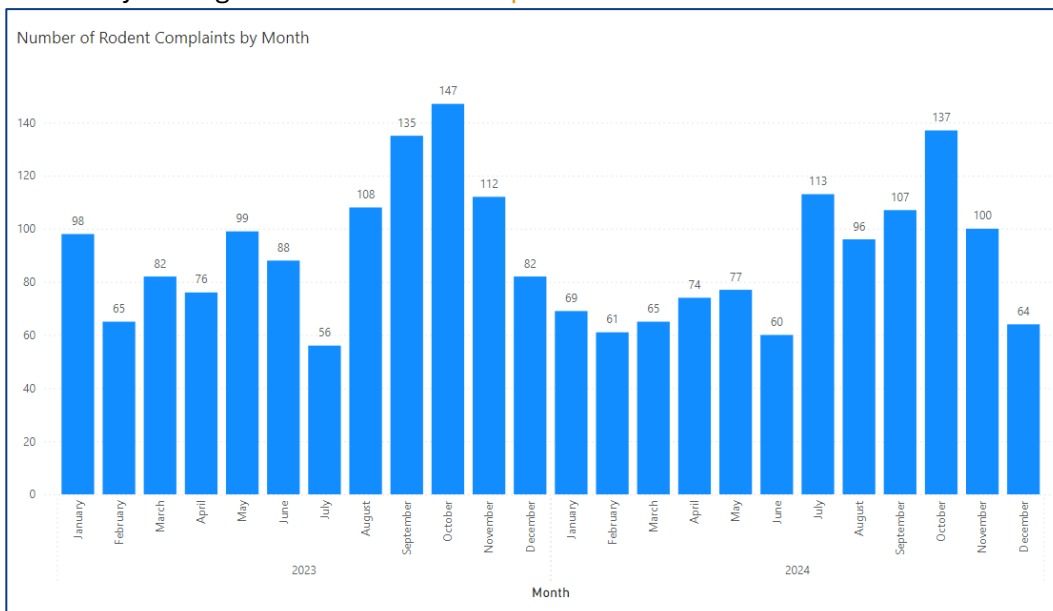
When temperatures outside begin to drop, you may notice pests like rodents (mice and rats) entering your home to escape the cold weather. Not only are they a nuisance, but rodents can spread serious diseases and cause property damage to your home.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an approach to pest management that combines different tactics to control pest populations. One part of the IPM is prevention or elimination. All animals need food, water, and shelter, so by eliminating these necessities you can prevent mice and rats from entering your home in the first place.



- **Food.** Rodents will eat almost anything, including garbage, pet food, grease stuck to ovens, and animal manure. Keep trash and rubbish secured in bins both indoors and outdoors. Keep all food (including pet food) in hard, sealed containers with fitted lids. Clean crumbs frequently. If you have a known rodent problem in your neighborhood or home, consider removing bird feeders and outdoor cat food sources. Rats only need 1 oz of food and water to survive, and mice need even less!
- **Water.** Address standing water issues outside and keep gutters clean. Fix dripping faucets and leaking pipes. Don't allow dishes to set out and soak overnight. Remove any trash or other items outdoors that may hold water, like tires.
- **Shelter.** Rodents will nest in piles of rubbish, junk cars, discarded furniture, and stacks of wood outdoors. They can also get inside easily and only need ¼" opening to squeeze through. That means they only need a hole the size of a dime to enter your home! Fill in cracks in foundation and seal off any entry points, especially around walls, ceilings, floors, wires, and pipes. Seal these entry points with rodent-proof materials like stainless steel wool topped with foam, or quick-drying concrete. Install door sweeps under doors. Cover outside dryer vents.

Learn more by visiting our [Vector Control Department website](#).



This graph shows the monthly number of rodent complaints received by MCPHD Vector Control Department 2023- 2024.

# HEALTH LITERACY MONTH

October is Health Literacy Month! This month, take time to celebrate and recognize the importance of making health information easy to understand and the health care system easier to navigate. [Healthy People 2030](#) lists two types of health literacy:

**Personal health literacy:** The degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.

**Organizational health literacy:** The degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.

Understanding and using health information requires skills from many fields like reading comprehension, analyzing information, and data literacy. The ability to weigh risks and benefits, make decisions, and take actions are also important. In the context of



environmental health, this can also include the ability to understand hazards in the environment and microenvironment (home or workplace) and understand how to reduce risks from these environments.

Why is recognizing Health Literacy Month so important? The CDC estimates that 9 out of 10 adults struggle to understand health information. That's a huge opportunity for public health

professionals to make a difference. At MCPHD, we are committed to making sure our information is easily accessible to everyone. Our goal with Environmental Public Health Tracking is to provide Marion County residents with the knowledge and tools necessary to make data-informed health decisions.

Find resources for Health Literacy Month at the [Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion website](#).

Learn more from the [CDC](#) and [World Health Organization](#)!



## IMPORTANT DATES

### Observances:

- National Food Safety Education Month (September)
- SepticSmart Week (September 15-19)
- World Environmental Health Day (September 26)
- Health Literacy Month (October)

### MCPHD Offices closed:

- Indigenous People's Day (October 13)
- Veteran's Day (November 11)
- Thanksgiving (November 26 noon - November 28)

### TAG (Technical Advisory Group Meetings):

- November 25

Daylight Savings Time ends November 2. Remember to set your clocks back 1 hour and to check and change the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms!

## LOCAL RESOURCES

- For a list of Certified Onsite Wastewater (Septic) professionals and other homeowner resources, visit <https://iowpa.org/>.
- Need to get rid of leaves or other trash? [The Citizen's Transfer Station](#) located at 2324 S Belmont Ave accepts up to two carloads per day at \$2 per car or \$5 per SUV. Operating hours are Saturdays 8 am-4 pm.

## TRACKING UPDATES

We've been refunded! We are excited to announce that the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program has received continued funding from the CDC.



*Marion County Public Health Department  
Environmental Tracking*

<https://marionhealth.org/ephtracking/>  
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