

Fatal cesspool collapse has Long Islanders concerned about safety

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The death of an elderly woman who fell through a collapsed cesspool Monday has many Long Islanders concerned about hidden cesspool dangers.

Ruth Cotgreave, 76, was found by her niece in a 6- to 8-foot-deep hole in the front yard of her Elwood home after 6 p.m. Monday. Investigators believe Cotgreave fell through her collapsed cesspool either late Sunday or early Monday.

Officials say the first step in protecting against a similar accident is for residents to know the type and age of any installed cesspool system. According to experts, houses built before 1975 are likely to have block cesspools that tend to rot and can cave in.

Daniel Kleinpeter, of Ranger Sewer, recommends replacing block cesspools with newer pre-cast versions that are reinforced with steel. Kleinpeter also warns residents to keep an eye out for buckling or sinking of the area around a cesspool. He says that is a warning sign that a block cesspool is about to collapse.