



Notice to all Property Owners who are replacing their onsite sewage system

When private onsite sewage systems must be replaced, a number of routine questions are generally asked. If you have been ordered to replace your system by the Department, some of the timing and coordination of issues can be even more important. We hope this document will address some of those concerns.

How long does it take to obtain a construction permit and install an onsite sewage system?

There are a number of steps in the process, involving several different parties/entities. Most of the steps in the process are the responsibility of the property owner to complete. These steps include:

- contacting and hiring a soil scientist to complete the soil test;
- submitting all required paperwork to the Department of Health, including:
 - legal description;
 - floor plans of the house;
 - copy of the soil report;
 - application for the onsite sewage system construction permit (to install the system);
 - application for the onsite sewage system operating permit (for maintenance and inspection of the system after installation);
 - payment for the appropriate fees;
 - signed notice regarding 2001 recessional moraine soil testing protocol.
- contacting and hiring an onsite designer; and
- contacting and hiring a certified installer

It is highly recommended that you engage in these above steps as early in the process as possible. Delaying steps in the process, no matter what your reason for replacement, could result in missing out on the narrow window for system construction that occurs during the drier summer months. If you have been issued an order to replace your system, waiting to begin the process usually results in problems in meeting deadlines and may require further legal action, including an order to vacate your home.

When the system design has been submitted, it will be reviewed and information will be provided back to the submitter. The Department of Health (DOH) attempts to review plans within a 10-day timeframe upon receipt if at all possible. The more complete the information is when it is submitted, the easier and quicker it will be for review, response and approval.

Further, the soil scientist, engineer and onsite system installer must all find time to fit the project into their schedule for all the required site visits. The busiest time of the year for this industry is during the dry summer months. Waiting until the middle of summer to begin contacting these individuals may result in being further out on their schedules, which will delay your installation process and possibly cause you to miss your installation deadlines.

Once the onsite sewage system construction permit has been issued by the DOH, it is valid for one year. Installers tend to prioritize based on which home has the permit that will expire the soonest, but also which sites are dry enough to begin construction. The dense clay soils of Allen County typically are not suitable for construction until mid-June. The fall rain showers of mid-October usually bring an end to the construction season. Therefore, the construction window is small and completely weather-dependent.

As you can see, there are many steps in the construction permit phase, and the window for installation is short. PLEASE CONSIDER STARTING THE ENTIRE PROCESS NOW! If you are under an order, delaying any step in the process may lead to further orders, including orders to vacate the property per state law. While we will make every effort to guide you through the process, ultimately it is your responsibility to ensure this task is completed. For obvious public health reasons, all homes with failed systems that have failed to comply within the time limit will be required to uncover the outlet of the septic tank, seal it, and begin pump and haul of waste until the new system can be completed. Acting early can avoid this process.

Water Conservation Tips

Until you can get your new system installed, you may be required to pump and haul your septic tank at some point. Below are some tips to reduce your amount of water usage, which will reduce the frequency with which you must have your septic tank pumped:

1. Use a laundromat to wash clothes. Washing machines generate a lot of wastewater and can fill a holding tank up quickly, especially in a growing family. You may notice some incidental time saving in this process by completing 4-5 loads at once – a chore that would take all day at home.
2. Disconnect any downspouts, floor drains, foundation drains, sump pumps or other sources of “clear” water from the septic tank. Please be aware that “grey” water (washing machines, sinks, showers, slop sinks) is considered wastewater and, along with “black” water (toilets), must drain to the septic tank for proper treatment and disposal.
3. Ensure that your septic tank has a water-tight lid, and is not allowing surface water to drain into the top of the tank.
4. Fix all leaking plumbing fixtures. A faucet with a slow drip may waste 36 gallons per day. A faucet with a heavy drip may waste 180 gallons per day. If the backflush valve of the water softener is stuck open or leaks, several hundred gallons per day may be wasted. A leaky toilet may waste over 100 gallons per day. Leak tests can be performed on toilets and water treatment devices to determine if there is a problem.
5. Retrofit your plumbing with water conservation devices. Examples include: low flow toilets, low flow shower heads and aerators on sinks.
6. Ultra-conscientious people may shut off the water during a shower, only turn it on to get wet, and then rinse off. Shutting off the sink while brushing your teeth helps also.
7. Some property owners are beginning to install water meters to monitor their own water usage.

Protecting Your Investment

The general understanding is that the atmosphere within a septic tank is potentially very hazardous to human health. It can also be very corrosive to the concrete structure of a septic tank and distribution box. The gases and bacteria work together to create a condition referred to as Microbial Induced Corrosion (‘MIC’), which, over time, can lead to softening, thinning and ultimately failure of the concrete walls in septic tanks and distribution boxes. This occurs at some sites in a relatively short time span. We have been studying the issue, but do not have enough information to be able to predict which sites are more susceptible to this corrosion; therefore, we recommend all sites be protected.

The standard practice for concrete septic tank manufacturers to combat this issue has been to apply a coating on the surface of the concrete above the water line in the tank (sidewalls and ceiling), which helps reduce this condition but may not eliminate it. Some property owners and installers have requested their onsite designer to specify plastic septic tanks in the design as an alternative to concrete tanks.

Another option is for the concrete tank manufacturer (at the request of the property owner/installer/designer) to insert an admixture into the concrete when the tank is being mixed and poured. This admixture prevents corrosion from occurring, thereby maintaining the structural integrity and thus increasing the lifespan of the septic tank and distribution box. This admixture has been available for 20 years and has been used by sewer utilities for new concrete structures. There is some additional cost to add this product into the tank mix. It is not currently required by state code; however, the admixture is recommended as a best management practice because the relatively small upfront cost to include the admixture will outweigh the future cost to completely replace a corroded tank. ***If you have further questions regarding adding this mixture into your new tank, contact your local septic tank manufacturer, installer, or onsite designer. If you decide to install a tank with this admixture, please be sure to notify this Department so that we can note this in our inspection records regarding your new tanks and d-box.***