Permitting Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems After Installation

Septic systems are referred to as onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS). Individuals seeking a permit from the Division of Environmental Health (DEH) for an OWTS installed without a permit must submit an application to the Planning and Building Department. The application will be forwarded to DEH for review while the Planning and Building Department conducts its project review.

1. **Will soils testing be required?**
   
   Yes, soils testing is part of the required site-evaluation process. System design is based in part on site specific soil conditions.

2. **Do I have to hire a private engineer/consultant to do a site evaluation?**
   
   Yes, a Qualified Professional must complete a site evaluation, and either confirm the existing OWTS meets current standards or propose an appropriate system design. Other Qualified Professionals who may conduct the site evaluation include Registered Civil Engineers, Professional Geologists, Registered Environmental Health Specialists and Certified Soil Scientists.

3. **How will I know if the OWTS (septic system) which was installed can be approved?**
   
   Consider a Pre-application review with a DEH Land Use staff member prior to hiring a Qualified Professional. The Pre-application review is offered at our hourly rate; it allows property owners to ask questions in advance and helps them understand permitting requirements. Contact DEH for an application.

4. **Are Plastic Septic Tanks Acceptable?**
   
   If the tank is proven to be IAPMO (International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials) certified, and a Qualified Professional confirms it is properly installed and properly functioning, it may be approved.

5. **What if the OWTS components or placement do not meet required specifications?**
   
   It may be possible to replace or modify components of an OWTS to bring it into compliance. If an existing OWTS does not meet current requirements (Humboldt County has had the same requirements for over 30 years), it may need to be abandoned and replaced with an appropriately designed system.

6. **If the OWTS requires modification or replacement, how long will I have to get the work done?**
   
   If an OWTS is found to be failing or operating in an unsafe manner, immediate corrective action will be required.
What other approved means of wastewater disposal might be used during a compliance period or to serve individuals working in a place where a built structure with a restroom doesn’t exist?

- Portable toilets may be used, provided that they are serviced regularly by a provider holding a permit to operate in Humboldt County.

- Pit privies are allowed under certain conditions (e.g., in rural locations, minimum 2-acre parcels, in an area evaluated and suitable for OWTS and 50’ from property lines). Pit privies must be constructed to exclude disease vectors and prevent nuisance, pollution and the spread of communicable disease.

- Cesspools and seepage pits are prohibited.

Please note that DEH does not issue a permit for pit privies. DEH will charge its hourly rate to review a Qualified Professional’s site evaluation results supporting the use of pit privies proposed in an operations plan.

Contact the Land Use Program staff at 707-445-6215 with any questions.