



Division of Environmental Health

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EXPLANATION OF NON-STANDARD ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM

NON-STANDARD ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM (NSOWTS) OPERATIONAL PERMITS

NSOWTS Operation Permits are required for all Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS) that meet the definition of a NSOWTS. This fact sheet discusses NSOWTS, the purpose of the program, and the requirements.

WHAT IS A NSOWTS?

NSOWTS or alternative systems include but are not limited to:

- Wisconsin mounds
- Pressure distribution systems
- Sand filters
- At grade systems
- Systems that have leach fields
- Septic tanks that are connected by a pipe that exceeds 500 linear feet

Non-standard systems are usually installed where soil and/or ground water conditions do not permit the installation of a standard system. Non-standard systems also differ from standard systems because they usually have a pump or dosing chamber and operate under pressure.

STANDARD OWTS

These are considered to be low-maintenance systems. Pumping the septic tank once every 5 to 7 years, annually alternating between dual leach fields (for systems installed after 1982), and prudent use of garbage disposal units are the primary maintenance tasks required.

NON-STANDARDS OWTS

These require significantly more maintenance. Pumps and pump chambers must be monitored for proper functioning, electrical and alarm systems must be periodically checked and repaired, pressure distribution lines must be monitored and flushed, and the sewage absorption area must be visually monitored and maintained. Maintenance is necessary to ensure that the system functions properly and does not create a public health threat or degrade the environment.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MONITORING PROGRAM

All owners of NSOWTS are required to apply for a three-year permit and pay a fee. An inspection is then performed by the Division of Environmental Health (DEH). The owner may choose the option to hire a qualified consultant or service provider to perform the inspection.

Each property owner is requested to complete a permit application every three years. Upon approval, a copy of the application will be kept on file at DEH. This will become the operational permit for the NSOWTS. The operational permit will remain valid as indicated on the approved application. Operational permits can be revoked if the NSOWTS is not functioning properly and the owner fails to take corrective action.

WHAT THE INSPECTION CONSISTS OF

The inspection is an opportunity for an owner to consult with DEH staff on the operation and maintenance of the NSOWTS. In some cases, property owners are unaware of the type of system that exists on their property. The inspection program provides basic guidelines on how to maintain the NSOWTS to achieve its maximum life expectancy.

IF I CHOOSE TO HIRE A QUALIFIED PROFESSIONAL OR SERVICE PROVIDER INSTEAD OF DEH

Qualified professionals and service providers are those that meet requirements of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and Humboldt County Ordinance. A qualified professional may be a licensed engineer, geologist, or a registered environmental health specialist. An example of a service provider is a septic tank pumper or installer with the required license, experience, and training. Please call DEH to confirm the service provider you choose is qualified. The consultant/service provider must provide a certified inspection report for the system during the three-year period of the operational permit. You may consult a local phone book or search online to find qualified consultants or service providers.

WHY THERE IS A MONITORING PROGRAM FOR NSOWTS

There are several reasons for this program. Humboldt County obtains its authority to permit OWTS from the State of California Regional Water Quality Control (RWQCB). The Public Health Branch, Division of Environmental Health (DEH) must comply with the requirements of the Humboldt County Onsite Wastewater Local Agency Management Program (LAMP) approved by the RWQCB. For NSOWTS or alternative systems, the LAMP requires that DEH have in place a monitoring program and report annually on the “operational status of the alternative systems within its jurisdiction”. Permitting and approval of NSOWTS provides an option in those areas that cannot support a standard system.

In 1989, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors approved an ordinance (Humboldt County Code Section 616-3) to meet the basin plan conditions, including establishment of the monitoring program. The ordinance was modified in 1997 to require annual operating permits, and in 1999 it was modified to a three-year permit. The ordinance was updated in December 2006 to provide options for qualified service providers and home-owner inspection after meeting certain criteria.

OTHER REASONS FOR THE PROGRAM INCLUDE

- The data provided by the program allows DEH to analyze which types of non-standard systems function best in the varied soil and water conditions in which they are installed.
- The inspection program allows early identification of potential problems, reducing the threat to public health and the environment.
- The inspection program increases the longevity of your system by preventing early failure. With regular inspection and maintenance, these systems will last longer and cost less.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

You may contact us at (707) 445-6215 or send us an e-mail at ENVHEALTH@co.humboldt.ca.us. Our office is located at the corner of 1st Street and H Street in Eureka.

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