

ON-LOT SEWAGE SYSTEM INFORMATION SHEET



Montgomery County Health Department Division of Water Quality Management

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FAQs (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

TESTING

Q: *What are the procedures involved in soil testing?*

A: Soil testing consists of test probes (which determine the type of soil) and perc tests (which determine the rate at which liquid drains into the soil). A private consultant is normally retained to perform soil testing. MCHD is prohibited from recommendations, but does provide a non-endorsed consultants list. Applications and fees must be forwarded to MCHD prior to scheduling any testing.

Q: *Does everyone need an elevated sand mound?*

A: No, the type of system to be installed is dependent upon the type of acceptable soil present on the property in question.

Q: *Can I choose the location of the septic system?*

A: Yes, dependent upon where the soil is determined to be suitable to sustain a septic system per current regulations. If several areas are suitable, the property owner can choose the location of the septic system.

Q: *Is there an expiration on the testing performed on my property?*

A: No, but current regulation states that testing conducted six (6) years prior to permit application submittal, may be subject to retesting. Retesting is determined by MCHD based upon the date of original testing, physical evidence and any disturbance to the absorption area site.

PERMITTING

Q: *Do I need soil testing?*

A: Yes, all individuals attempting to subdivide land or plan to install an on-lot septic system are required to perform soil testing to determine if the proposed lot(s) is suitable to sustain a septic system.

Q: *How long is my permit valid?*

A: All septic system permits are valid for three (3) years from date of issuance. However, if construction of the structure and system has not commenced within three (3) years, the permit will expire. Permit records are available, upon request, from 1991 to present.

Q: *Do I need a permit to fix my septic system?*

A: Yes, a permit is required by MCHD when repairing, replacing or altering any component of the septic system. A permit is not required for maintenance practices, such as, pumping the septic tank.

Q: *Can I build an addition to my home if it is served by a septic system?*

A: Yes, however, MCHD requires homeowners to submit a Re-Use of the existing septic system proposal prior to obtaining a building permit from the local municipality. MCHD will review each proposal to determine adequacy of the septic system.

Q: *What are the procedures for transferring a permit?*

A: After the sale of a property, the new owner may forward the original permit along with a copy of the deed and the appropriate fee to MCHD. The expiration date will remain the same.

PERMITTING cont.

Q: *Are cesspools allowed to be installed?*

A: No, cesspools are no longer permitted under current regulation. However, cesspools in use may continue to be used until they are determined to be malfunctioning.

Q: *What happens if the soil on my property does not meet the requirements?*

A: If you own an unimproved lot and cannot meet the minimum

requirements for site suitability, other options are available through local and state permitting. If you are replacing an existing system due to a malfunction, the MCHD and state have options for those lots with severe limitations.

Q: *How do I obtain a new permit when the original permit has expired?*

A: A new application and fee must be forwarded to MCHD. The submission of a new design is

dependent upon the information on the existing design and any changes to the regulations.

Q: *During construction, can my tanks be moved?*

A: Yes, the tanks can be moved during construction. It is recommended that you contact MCHD before construction to consult with a Sewage Enforcement Officer for applicable approvals.

MAINTENANCE

Q: *How often should I have my septic tank pumped out?*

A: All septic tanks should be pumped out at least once every three (3) years to remove accumulated solids at the bottom of the tank. A more frequent pumping schedule may be needed dependent upon individual homeowner use.

Q: *How do I find out if my septic system is working properly?*

A: The septic system should be inspected on a regular basis for signs of wetness, black staining, odor, or high grass areas. Other signs of a possible problem may occur in the dwelling and be exhibited by slow draining plumbing fixtures. A private consultant with expertise in septic systems can be contracted to have the system certified.

Q: *Can I use my garbage disposal?*

A: It is not recommended to use any type of garbage disposal. Fine waste particles can bypass the septic tank and

enter the drainfield causing clogging of the lateral network and soil beneath the system.

Q: *Can I use additives in my septic tank?*

A: It is not recommended to use any type of additive in your septic tank. Additives tend to compete with the natural bacteria in the septic tank and soil and often inhibit the effectiveness of the natural bacteria.

Q: *Can I plant vegetation on my septic system?*

A: It is recommended to maintain grass or sod cover on the septic system. However, shallow rooted plantings should not adversely impact the septic system. Bushes, shrubs, and trees should not be planted on or near the septic system due to possible interference of roots within the lateral network. The root system may also create a path of least resistance for the sewage effluent to follow.

Q: *How often can I wash laundry?*

A: The act of washing laundry should have no effect on the performance of a properly functioning septic system. However, it is recommended to launder over an extended period of time, rather than all in one day.

Q: *Can my sump pump water be discharged to the treatment tank?*

A: No, current regulation states that foundation drainage and floor drains cannot be discharged to a treatment tank. It is also not permitted to discharge this flow over the septic system and its components.

Q: *Can MCHD provide septic system certifications?*

A: No, the act of certifying a septic system by an SEO would be considered a conflict of interest. Septic certifications are not regulated by Act # 537.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT THE
DIVISION OF WATER QUALITY
MANAGEMENT.**