

**Thurston County Onsite Sewage System Management Plan
2014 Advisory Committee Recommendations for Plan Update**

The Challenge

Nearly 53,000 septic systems in Thurston County treat almost 12,000,000 gallons of sewage per day. That's more than the sewage treatment plant that serves Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater.

While septic system maintenance and operation is the responsibility of the owner; problems, especially failing septic systems, impact people and resources beyond the owner and their property boundary. The county health department has a responsibility to be sure there is a system to find and repair failing septic systems and ensure that all septic systems are routinely inspected, function properly, and are repaired as needed. Currently less than a third (about 28%) of the septic systems require a renewable operational certificate – one method used to ensure systems are functioning properly. Only about one-fourth (22%) of the other septic systems in the county have current documented inspections.

Goals of the Plan

- Protect public health & water resources by making sure that sewage is treated and disposed of adequately.
- Inventory septic systems, identify and ensure repair of failing septic systems
- Focus on the ongoing maintenance and operation of septic systems.
- Plan elements should meet the requirements of state law: WAC246-272A, RCW 70.118A and meet the needs of Thurston County citizens, make sense, and be reasonable.



Highlights from the Proposed Plan

- Increase program efficiencies so staff can **focus on correcting failing or deficient septic systems**. For example, requiring that reports are submitted electronically frees the time staff spent on data entry and allows them to focus on correcting problems. Electronic records such as record drawings/as-builts; pump reports & inspection reports are more efficiently available to public on-line, 24 hours a day.
- When **selling a home**, the **septic system must be pumped and inspected**. The recommendation is that in addition, **deficiencies in the septic system must be corrected** before the time of transfer report is complete.
- Make septic system **education reliably available county-wide**. Send routine inspection and maintenance reminders to all system owners. Update the website, and regularly offer septic maintenance workshops.
- Refine criteria used to **identify Sensitive Areas and Marine Recovery Areas which require more intensive septic system monitoring and maintenance** in order to protect public health. Current examples are the Henderson & Nisqually Marine Recovery Areas. Recommendations are to designate Eld Inlet as a Marine Recovery Area and Summit Lake as a Sensitive Area, and further evaluate Totten Inlet and the Budd/Deschutes watershed.
- Continue to develop and implement a **robust system to evaluate** the septic operation & maintenance program to be sure it is meeting public health goals.

- **Create a funding strategy** that is stable, self-sustaining, and adequate to fund a viable septic operation and maintenance program. It should be equitable and have ways to help low-income owners.
 - The advisory committee recommends a single charge that **replaces existing fees** including those for operational permits, pump reports, time of transfer application, and shellfish protection district septic system charges. The proposed charge will be collected via the property tax statement.
 - The proposed charge will be reduced 50% for those in the senior/disabled tax exemption program.
 - There are **two proposals for how to structure the charges**.
 - A **flat charge** of \$45 per year to all septic system owners.
 - A **tiered** structure based on the location of the septic system,

documented water quality problems, and the type of work required by the health department in those areas.

- \$22/year for septic systems in the Chehalis watershed (southern Thurston County outside of Puget Sound basin).
- \$44/year for septic systems in the Puget Sound basin but not in a special area (Deschutes, Totten and southern Nisqually watersheds).
- \$66/year for septic systems in a Marine Recovery Area or other special area, currently Henderson and Nisqually Shellfish Protection Districts.
- The following chart shows the costs to owners of a single-family home over a 10-year period comparing the current fee-based charges, the flat-rate, and the tiered approach.

Cost Comparisons – 10 years Assumes 1 Time of Transfer in 10 years, 3 Pump Reports in 10 years, and operational certificates if needed			
	Current	Flat Rate	Tiered
Nisqually MRA - low risk	\$875	\$450	\$660
Henderson MRA – high risk	\$1,275	\$450	\$660
Operational Certificate – Puget Sound	\$630	\$450	\$440
Operational Certificate – Chehalis	\$630	\$450	\$220
No Operational Certificate – Puget Sound	\$255	\$450	\$440
No Operational Certificate - Chehalis	\$255	\$450	\$220

To read the full version of the draft recommendations please visit www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp. A survey to provide input is also on the website and will be open until 5:00 pm, Thursday, February 18, 2016. Comments or questions may also be sent to Jane Mountjoy-Venning, 360-867-2643 or venninj@co.thurston.wa.us. Mailing address: 412 Lilly Road NE; Olympia, WA 98506. All comments and the survey results will be shared with the Board of Health.

Thank you for your interest!