



SEPTIC SYSTEM CARE BEGINS WITH YOU

On-Site Septic System Management Plan Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why is this Septic System Management Plan necessary?

A. Many citizens throughout Thurston County are concerned about water quality. Failing septic systems can impact surface water such as lakes, rivers, and Puget Sound and pose a risk to our drinking water. Owners are responsible for the care of their septic system. The Health Department has a responsibility to ensure there is a system in place to: find and repair failing septic systems; ensure all septic systems are routinely inspected, function properly, and are repaired; and protect the public health from sewage. This plan lays out the steps necessary for the Health Department to implement this system and ensure public safety.

Q. What does this plan do?

A. This plan invests in several important improvements. It protects public health by protecting water resources, including drinking water, by reducing exposure to sewage from failing systems. The plan creates a system for preventing, identifying, and correcting failing septic systems and water pollution problems caused by sewage. It creates an inventory of septic systems to identify and ensure septic system owners get the information that they need to monitor and maintain their systems. It also provides staff to answer questions and help owners troubleshoot their systems and give assistance to owners to find grants or loans to fix failures.

Q. Isn't this just another additional new tax by the county?

A. No, the proposed charges will replace fees currently charged including time of transfer (sale) reports, pumper reports, and operational certificate renewals. The proposed charges will also replace the special Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach Shellfish District Protection charges that are billed and collected via the property tax statement.

Q. How much is the proposed charge for me as a septic system owner?

A. It is a tiered charge structure based on septic system location, documented water quality problems, and type of work required by the Health Department in each area. Estimated costs are: \$22 per year for septic systems in the Chehalis River watershed, \$44 per year for septic systems in the Puget Sound basin but not in the special areas, and \$66 per year for septic systems in special areas such as the Marine Recovery areas.

Q. What does the charge cover?

A. The charges will invest in services recommended in the plan. Those recommendations include: improvements to the electronic database system; staffing to provide needed quality assurance, water quality monitoring, and investigation; and county-wide education for all septic system owners.

Q. Would this replace or be in addition to the septic contractor's fees?

A. Septic contractors charge fees for the services that they provide. The proposed charges are to update the county's septic program and are not the same as the service fees charged by the septic professionals that you may contract with.

Q. So with this new plan, can the county just come on my property and inspect my septic system?

A. No, the county must follow a process when working with property owners. Environmental Health staff currently inspect septic systems by conducting dye tests on high risk systems in sensitive areas. They do not go on to private property without permission. If access to the property is necessary, staff will work with the property owner to set up the most convenient time and availability. If necessary, the health officer can apply to a judge for a search warrant. Article I of the Thurston County Sanitary Code has included this provision since June 1, 1999.

Q. What happens if inspection finds a problem?

A. Staff will work with the homeowners to correct problems.

Q. What are the penalties for not correcting issues found during an inspection?

A. If a septic system is not in compliance with the county's requirements, the county will not issue requested permits. If a septic system is failing, it must be corrected. Enforcement actions are regulated by Thurston County's Sanitary Code: www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehadm/rules_regs.

Q. What will happen when I sell my property?

A. At the time of a property transfer, you must have your septic tank pumped and inspected. The proposed update would allow staff to follow up and make sure that any problems found at the time of inspection are corrected.

Need more information?

Website: www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp

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