



SEPTIC SYSTEM DYE TEST INFORMATION

SEPTIC SYSTEM CARE BEGINS WITH YOU

The process:

Dye test staff will come to your site once a week, typically during low tide, for four weeks.

1st week: Place background charcoal packets.

2nd week: Pour dye into household plumbing, pick up background packets & place fresh packets. A responsible adult must be home.

3rd week: Replace packets.

4th week: Pick up packets.

Next Steps: The packets are then processed in our lab. If dye is found, samples are sent to an outside laboratory to resolve any problems found.

If needed, staff may return to the site to take water samples and work with you on next steps to resolve any problems found.

Possible Test Results:

Dye Negative: No dye is found surfacing.

Dye Positive: Dye is found and confirmed by a laboratory and the bacteria are within acceptable limits.

Failure: Dye is found and confirmed by a laboratory, and bacteria are above acceptable limits.

Dye Tests: What You Need to Know

A dye test is done by Environmental Health staff from the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department to help determine if a septic system is failing. While dye tests do not find all possible problems, they are especially useful for locating seeping sewage on properties located on or near the shoreline.

They work by flushing non-toxic tracer dye down a toilet and sink and placing charcoal packets downhill of the septic system. The charcoal packets are there to collect any dyed sewage that may leak from the system.



Staff Putting Dye into the Toilet



Charcoal Packet Used for Dye Test



*Dye Identified in Run Off Pipe.
Please note: most failures are not so obvious.*

Your next steps depend on the dye test results.

If the dye test is negative: Our team will notify you if there are any other actions necessary. For instance, an inspection by a certified septic professional.

If the dye test is positive: You will need to hire a certified septic professional to inspect the septic system and submit the report. Tell them where the dye was found and ask them to investigate and help determine if repairs are needed. There may be further actions necessary depending on the repairs necessary. Our team will be in contact with you to assist you through the process.

If the dye test shows that there is a septic failure: Hire a certified septic professional to investigate the failure and make repairs. Many repairs will require a permit. Funding options to help with a repair may be available. Our team will be in contact with you to assist you through the process.

Contact Us

<https://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehoss/index.html> or contact us at: phss_pic@co.thurston.wa.us and 360-867-2626 for more information.

Frequently Asked Questions About Dye Tests and Repairs

Why do I have to do this?

Sewage that is not properly treated can harm human health. Septic systems that cause pollution in our local waterways must be fixed as soon as possible. Henderson and Nisqually Inlets are recovering from bacteria pollution that affects valuable shellfish growing areas. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services are working in partnership with you and your neighbors to improve the health and safety of the water. We need to protect our water resources from viruses and bacteria found in untreated wastewater.

How do you know it's my sewage?

The Health Department has multiple dyes that can be used. Staff separate the properties that are dye tested to make sure we know what dye comes from what property. We also take control samples before the test begins to compare any dye that is found prior to our test beginning.

How do I know what to repair?

Your septic professional will help trouble shoot the system to find the problem. There may be methods of checking the pipes without digging. Simple repairs commonly discovered include leaking transport pipes or baffles. Sometimes major repairs are needed such as replacing a leaking septic tank or drainfield. Your septic professional will make this determination.

How much will the repair cost?

It depends on what the problem is. Repair costs range from hundreds of dollars for minor repairs to tens of thousands of dollars if major parts of the system need replacement. There are low-interest financing options available through the Clean Water Loan program, www.Craft3.org/CleanWater.