Guide

Frequently Asked Questions: Existing System Evaluation Report Form and Inspections

State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Water Quality Onsite Program
165 E. 7th Ave Ste 100
Eugene, OR 97401
Phone: (541) 686-7838
(800) 844-8467
Fax: (541) 686-7551
www.oregon.gov/DEQ

1. **Question:** Who is allowed to perform existing system evaluations, also called septic system inspections?
   Answer: Only certified individuals that have experience performing inspections are allowed to perform existing system evaluations.

   Accepted certifications listed in OAR 340-071-0155: licensed and certified septic system installer, certified maintenance provider, registered environmental health specialist, licensed professional engineer, NAWT certified inspector, or other professional certification approved in writing by DEQ.

   Note: Licensed pumpers are not allowed to perform existing system evaluations unless they also have one of the certifications listed above.

2. **Question:** When is the ESER form used?
   Answer: The ESER form must be used every time an existing system evaluation, also called septic system inspection, is performed.

3. **Question:** Who is supposed to use the ESER form?
   Answer: Any person performing an existing system evaluation must use the DEQ-approved ESER form. This includes Installers, Maintenance Providers, NAWT Certified Inspectors, Environmental Health Specialists, Professional Engineers, County agents and DEQ agents.

4. **Question:** I am a Certified NAWT Inspector. Can I use the NAWT inspection form to report results from an inspection?
   Answer: No. You must use the DEQ-approved ESER form to report inspection results. The ESER form is specific to systems used in Oregon and technical terms commonly used in Oregon.

5. **Question:** I am a Maintenance Provider and have O&M contracts for ATT's, sand filters, pressure distribution and re-circulating gravel filter systems. Do I use the ESER form when providing service and maintenance to these systems as part of an annual service maintenance contract?
   Answer: No. The ESER form is *not* used for service and maintenance performed as part of an annual service maintenance contract.

6. **Question:** I meet the qualifications needed to perform Existing System Evaluations. Where do I sign-up as an Oregon Septic Smart Inspector?
   Answer: Sign-up as an Inspector through the Oregon Septic Smart Pro website

7. **Question:** Where can I find a list of Oregon Septic Smart Inspectors?
   Answer: Find a list of certified and approved Inspectors on the Oregon Septic Smart Home website.

8. **Question:** I hired an Inspector to inspect my septic system. Should I be there when the inspection is being performed?

Last Updated: 3/17/14
By: P. Woolverton

340-071-0155

Existing System Evaluation Report

(1) An evaluation of an existing onsite wastewater treatment system must meet the following requirements:
(a) An evaluation must be performed by a person with one or more of the qualifications listed below:
(A) Professional Engineer in accordance with ORS chapter 672 with knowledge and experience inspecting onsite systems;
(B) Registered Environmental Health Specialist or Wastewater Specialist in accordance with ORS chapter 700 with knowledge and experience inspecting onsite systems;
(C) A certified installer with knowledge and experience inspecting onsite systems;
(D) A certified maintenance provider with knowledge and experience inspecting onsite systems;
(E) A current NAWT inspector training and certification accreditation;
(F) Other similar license or certification approved in writing by DEQ.
(b) An evaluation must include the following:
(A) An examination of the records available on the existing system, including all permit records and pumping and other maintenance records.
Department of Environmental Quality Water Quality Division

(B) For existing systems without a permit record, the inspector must create a record to document system materials, components, and location. Methods used to create the record may include the use of soil probes, metal detectors, electronic pipe tracers, radio and video technology, and uncovering system components.
(C) A field inspection of the existing system.
(D) A report of findings on a form approved by DEQ including the information obtained relevant to system performance, such as age; usage; records of installation, maintenance, and repairs; type, size, capacity, and condition of components; evidence of any failures; other relevant information (e.g., condition of repair area if known); and a complete sketch of the system showing location and distances of major components.
(E) The evaluation must include all portions of the system that serve the facility, including any portion located on a lot or parcel different from the lot or parcel on which the facility the system serves is located.
(2) A person may not conduct an existing system evaluation required by this rule unless he or she meets the
qualifications in subsection (1)(a) of this rule prior to conducting the evaluation.
(3) Any person may request an agent to provide an evaluation report on an existing onsite wastewater
treatment system.
(4) A completed application form must be submitted to the agent with all necessary exhibits and the existing
system evaluation fee in OAR 340-071-0140(2).
Stat. Auth.: ORS 454.625 & 468.020
Stats. Implemented: ORS 454.615, 454.755, 468B.015 & 468B.080
Hist.: DEQ 8-1983, f. & ef. 5-25-83; DEQ 27-1994, f. 11-15-94, cert. ef. 4-1-95; DEQ 11-2004, f. 12-22-04,
cert. ef. 3-1-05

Answer: The DEQ recommends that you be present during the septic system inspection. If you have any questions about the information reported to you on the ESER form you can immediately ask the Inspector for clarification.

9. **Question:** I do not want to have my septic tank pumped, but the Inspector told me they would not be able to inspect the septic tank if it was not pumped. Why?
   Answer: DEQ recommends having your septic tank pumped so the tank can be properly inspected. The Inspector will not be able to see all of the tank components if the tank is full of solids, scum and wastewater. The Inspector has to write down that you declined to have your tank pumped if you decide not to have this service.

10. **Question:** I want to have my septic tank inspected, but I do not want a full septic system inspection. Who is allowed to perform this service and what form do they use to report the findings?
    Answer: The requirements for septic tank inspection are the same: only those individuals described in #1 above are allowed to perform this service. The Inspector must use the ESER form to report the findings of the septic tank inspection, and they must also write down why the other sections of the ESER form were not completed.

11. **Question:** I want to have a records review (permit, maintenance records, etc), but I do not want a full septic system inspection. Who is allowed to perform this service and what form do they use to report the findings?
    Answer: The requirements for a records review are the same: only those individuals described in #1 above are allowed to perform this service. The system owner can compile and provide the records to an Inspector, but the Inspector must use the ESER form to report the findings of the records review. The Inspector must also write down on the ESER form why the other sections of the ESER form were not completed.

12. **Question:** I got an estimate for a septic system inspection, and it costs more than what I paid for a tank pumping and inspection last time. Why does it cost more?
    Answer: The ESER form reflects the new standard for performing septic system inspections. The cost of an inspection will account for the work entailed in completing the ESER form.

13. **Question:** Do I need to submit a copy of a completed ESER form to DEQ?
    Answer: No, you do not need to submit a copy of a completed ESER form to DEQ. After an inspection, the Inspector will provide a completed ESER form to the client that ordered the inspection.

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Last Updated: 3/17/14
By: P. Woolverton

Existing System Evaluation Report for Onsite Wastewater Systems

State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Onsite Program
165 East Seventh Ave, Suite 100
Eugene, OR 97401

Please answer the following questions completely. Do not leave any blank responses. Write unknown if unknown. Refer to Oregon Administrative Rule 340-071-0155 for more information, and please visit http://www.oregon.gov/DEQ/WQ/pages/onsite/septicsmart.aspx.

Septic System Owner-Provided Information:

Property Owner(s)(Sellers): _____ Telephone: _____

Site Address: _____ City: _____ Zip Code: _____

County: _____ Lot Size: _____ Acres/Square Feet (circle units)

Legal Description: _____

Age of wastewater treatment system _____ (years) Is there a service contract for system components? _____

Date the septic tank was last pumped _____ (please attach receipt if available)

Number of people occupying dwelling _____ If unoccupied, for how long has it been vacant? _____

Was this section completed by the evaluator because own or agent was unavailable? _____

The above information is true and to the best of my knowledge.

_____

Date (MM/DD/YYYY) Signature of Owner, or agent if present

Name of person performing evaluation (please print): _____

Certification:

- ☐ Installer
- ☐ Maintenance Provider
- ☐ National Association of Wastewater Technicians
- ☐ Other: DEQ approved in writing (please describe) _____
- ☐ Professional Engineer
- ☐ Environmental Health Specialist
- ☐ Waste Water Specialist

Certification Number: _____

Business name _____ Email _____

Business address _____ Phone _____

Date of Evaluation: _____ (MM/DD/YYYY)

I hereby certify, by my signature, that I meet all of the qualifications required to perform onsite wastewater system evaluations in the state of Oregon pursuant to OAR 340-071-0155.

_____

Date (MM/DD/YYYY) Signature of Qualified Septic System Evaluator

1. **General System Information**
   The Existing System Evaluation Report form contains 8 pages. Some of the questions on this form may not pertain to the system being evaluated, as there are many system designs. If you (the septic system evaluator) are unable to answer any of the questions on this form please indicate, in writing, why this information was not available at the time the evaluation was completed.

- The existing septic system consists of (check all that apply):

☐ Septic Tank
☐ Dosing Tank
☐ Multi-compartment Tank
☐ Seepage Bed
☐ Other _____
☐ Cesspool
☐ Disposal Trenches/ Leach Lines
☐ Capping Fill
☐ Sand Filter

Note: Cesspools may be used only to serve existing sewage loads and if failing only be replaced with a seepage pit system on lots that are too small to accommodate a standard system or other alternative onsite system.
There is a permit for the septic system ☐Yes ☐No ☐Unknown

- Permit Number(s) _____
- Year original septic system installed: _____ (YYYY) ☐No record of installation date
- Dates of subsequent repairs or alterations: _____ (YYYY)
- All plumbing fixtures are connected to the septic system ☐Yes ☐No ☐Unknown

  If you answered "No" or "unknown," please describe below:

  _____
  _____

- Additional Comments:

  _____
  _____

2. **Overall Septic System Status**

- Discharge of sewage to the ground surface ☐Yes ☐No ☐None observed
- Discharge of sewage to surface waters ☐Yes ☐No ☐None observed
- Sewage backup into plumbing fixtures ☐Yes ☐No ☐Unknown
- Additional Comments:

  _____
  _____

3. **Septic tank**

In order to fully describe the condition of the tank, the septic tank may need to be pumped. Please indicate below if the septic system tank was pumped during the course of *this* evaluation.

- Septic tank was pumped during the course of *this* evaluation ☐Yes ☐No
- If the septic tank was **NOT pumped** during the course of *this* evaluation, please explain (e.g. septic system owner declined to have the tank pumped etc):

- The septic tank material is:
  - ☐ Concrete
  - ☐ Steel
  - ☐ Plastic
  - ☐ Fiberglass
  - ☐ Other (explain)_____
  - ☐ Unknown
- Is the septic tank accessible? ☐Yes ☐No
- Septic tank volume in gallons_____
- Tank volume determined by: Check all that apply, add comments below as needed
  ☐ Permit Records ☐ Measured ☐ Stamped on Tank ☐ Other
- Septic tank risers are at ground level ☐Yes ☐No
- Tank appears to be free from defects, leaking and signs of deterioration ☐Yes ☐No
  If you answered "No," please describe the condition of the septic tank below. For example, evidence of gas corrosion, cracks, leaks, etc.
- Septic tank lid(s) is intact ☐Yes ☐No
- Septic tank baffles are intact: Inlet ☐Yes ☐No Outlet ☐Yes ☐No
- Baffle material - Inlet ☐Plastic ☐Concrete ☐Metal Outlet ☐Plastic ☐Concrete ☐Metal
  Effluent filter is present ☐Yes ☐No
- Effluent filter is free of debris ☐Yes ☐No ☐Not Applicable
- Liquid level in tank relative to invert of outlet ☐At ☐Above ☐Below
  If above or below invert outlet, please explain: _____
- **Scum** layer _____(inches) **Sludge** layer_____(inches)
- **Scum** and **Sludge** layer more than 35% of the *total* tank volume ☐Yes ☐No
  Indicate where sludge measured from: ☐Inlet ☐Middle ☐Outlet
- Additional Comments:

4. **Dosing tank / Pump Basin**

   Dosing tanks use a pump to send effluent to a treatment unit or a soil absorption field.

- The septic system has a dosing tank ☐Yes ☐No
  (If "No," skip the rest of section 4)
- At the time of this evaluation the power was on to test the pump(s): ☐Yes ☐No

- Dosing tank capacity _____(gallons)
- Tank volume determined by: Check all that apply, add comments below as needed
  ☐ Permit Records ☐ Measured ☐ Stamped on Tank ☐ Other
- Dosing tank material_____
- Dosing tank appears to be watertight and in good condition ☐Yes ☐No
- Dosing tank lid is intact ☐Yes ☐No
- Electrical components are sealed and watertight ☐Yes ☐No
- Pump/ siphon is functional ☐Yes ☐No
- Type of Pump ☐Demand dose ☐Time dose
- Pump control mechanism is functional (floats, pressure transducer) ☐Yes ☐No
- There is a high water alarm ☐Yes ☐No
- The high water alarm (audible and visual) is working ☐Yes ☐No ☐Not Applicable
- Type of screen_____
- Screen is clean and free of debris ☐Yes ☐No - Screen cleaned for this evaluation ☐Yes ☐No
- Scum/ sludge present in Dosing tank ☐Yes ☐No
- **Scum** layer _____(inches) **Sludge** layer_____(inches)
- Additional Comments:

_____

_____

5. **Soil absorption system**

The soil absorption system is a set of trenches that receives effluent from the septic tank and filters the effluent before it enters the groundwater.

- The septic system has a soil absorption system ☐Yes ☐No ☐Unknown
- Was the soil absorption system part of the evaluation? ☐Yes ☐No ☐See note below

  If the soil absorption system was not evaluated, please explain below (for example unable to locate, client did not authorize this part of the evaluation):

  _____

  _____

- Absorption distribution ☐Equal ☐Serial ☐Pressure ☐Equal via pressure
- Absorption lines construction material:

☐ Gravel and pipe ☐ Chamber ☐ Tile ☐ Polystyrene foam and pipe ☐Other_____

- Absorption distribution unit(s): ☐dropbox ☐hydrosplitter ☐equal distribution box

☐ Intact ☐ Damaged ☐ N/A

- Absorption distribution unit(s) are free of debris or solids ☐Yes ☐No ☐ N/A

- Locate all drain lines in soil absorption system ☐Yes ☐No

  Total length of drain lines_____(ft)

  Lengths determined by ☐Physically uncovering portions of system/probing ☐Written records ☐Fish tape ☐Electronic locator ☐ camera

- Absorption area appears to be **free** from roads, vehicular traffic, structures, livestock, deep-rooted plants etc.

  ☐Yes ☐No

  If you answered "No," please describe below:

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Absorption area appears to be **free** from surface water runoff and down spouts ☐Yes ☐No
- Evidence of ponding in absorption area or distribution unit(s) ☐Yes ☐No
- The soil absorption system replacement area assigned in the permit record appears to be intact:

  ☐Yes ☐No ☐ Replacement area not identified in permit record

  If you answered "No," please explain below:

  _____
  _____
  _____

- Additional Comments:

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

6. **Sand Filter System**

   There are different sand filter system designs used in Oregon. Not every sand filter system will contain all of the components mentioned below, e.g. pumps. The owner of a sand filter system **permitted on or after January 2, 2014** *must* maintain an annual service contract with a certified Maintenance Provider. Maintenance records should be available from the system owner, or the contracted Maintenance Provider. **Please attach copies of the previous two years of maintenance records to this evaluation form.**

- The septic system has a sand filter ☐Yes ☐No

  (If "No," skip the rest of section 6)

- Type of sand filter

  ☐ Intermittent
  ☐ Recirculating
  ☐ Bottomless

- Sand filter container appears free from defects, leaks and signs of deterioration: ☐Yes ☐No

- Sand filter unit appears to be **free** from roads, vehicular traffic, structures, livestock, deep-rooted plants etc.

  ☐Yes ☐No

  If you answered "No," please describe below:

  _____

  _____

  _____

- Sand filter appears to be **free** from surface water runoff and down spouts ☐Yes ☐No
- Evidence of ponding in/ on sand filter media surface ☐Yes ☐No
- Surface access to manifold and valves ☐Yes ☐No
- Monitoring ports are present ☐Yes ☐No
- Lateral lines flushed and equal distribution verified ☐Yes ☐No
- The sand filter has a pump ☐Yes ☐No

  (If "No", skip the rest of section 6)
- Pump vault appears to be watertight and in good condition ☐Yes ☐No ☐N/A
- Pump is functional ☐Yes ☐No
- Pump control mechanism is functional (floats, pressure transducer) ☐Yes ☐No
- High water alarm in pump vault (audible and visual) is working ☐Yes ☐No
- Pump electrical components are sealed and watertight ☐Yes ☐No

- Additional Comments:

  _____

  _____

  _____

7. **Alternative Treatment Technology System**
   The owner of an ATT system *must* maintain an annual service contract with a certified Maintenance Provider. Maintenance records should be available from the system owner, or the contracted Maintenance Provider. **Please attach copies of the previous two years of maintenance records to this evaluation form.**

   Note* Some ATT systems may have a WPCF permit. Please contact the local Health Department or the DEQ to obtain a copy of the WPCF permit.

- The septic system has an **Alternative Treatment Technology (ATT)** ☐Yes ☐No
  (If "No," skip the rest of section 7)
- Please provide the product name, system ID number, and manufacturer name below:

Product name _____
System ID number _____
Manufacturer name _____

- Previous two years of maintenance records are available ☐Yes ☐No
  If you answered "No," please explain below:

  _____
  _____
  _____

- Previous two years of maintenance records are attached to this form ☐Yes ☐No
  If you answered "No," please explain below:

  _____
  _____

- Additional Comments:

  _____
  _____
  _____

8. **Please attach a copy** of the following items to this form. Contact the DEQ, or the local Health Department to locate these items.
- The septic system permit(s) to this form, if available
- The as-built drawing(s) to this form, if available
- The Certificate of Satisfactory Completion to this form, if available
- Additional Comments:

  _____
  _____
  _____

9. **Provide a Site Plan**
- Please provide a sketch of the complete system (show only system components that were evaluated) on page 8 of this form, if a copy of the original "as-built" drawing is *not* available.
- Please provide a sketch of the complete system on page 8 of this form if the original "as-built" drawing is *not* accurate or representative of the existing system.
- If the original "as-built" drawing is available for copy, and the original appears to be accurate and representative of the existing system, write "see attached as-built" on page 8 of this form, redrawing the system is unnecessary.
- Additional Comments:

  _____
  _____
  _____

10. **Disclaimer:**
    This evaluation report describes the septic system as it exists on the date of evaluation and to the extent that components and operation of the system are reasonably observable. DEQ recognizes that this evaluation report does not provide assurance or any warranty that the system will operate properly in the future.

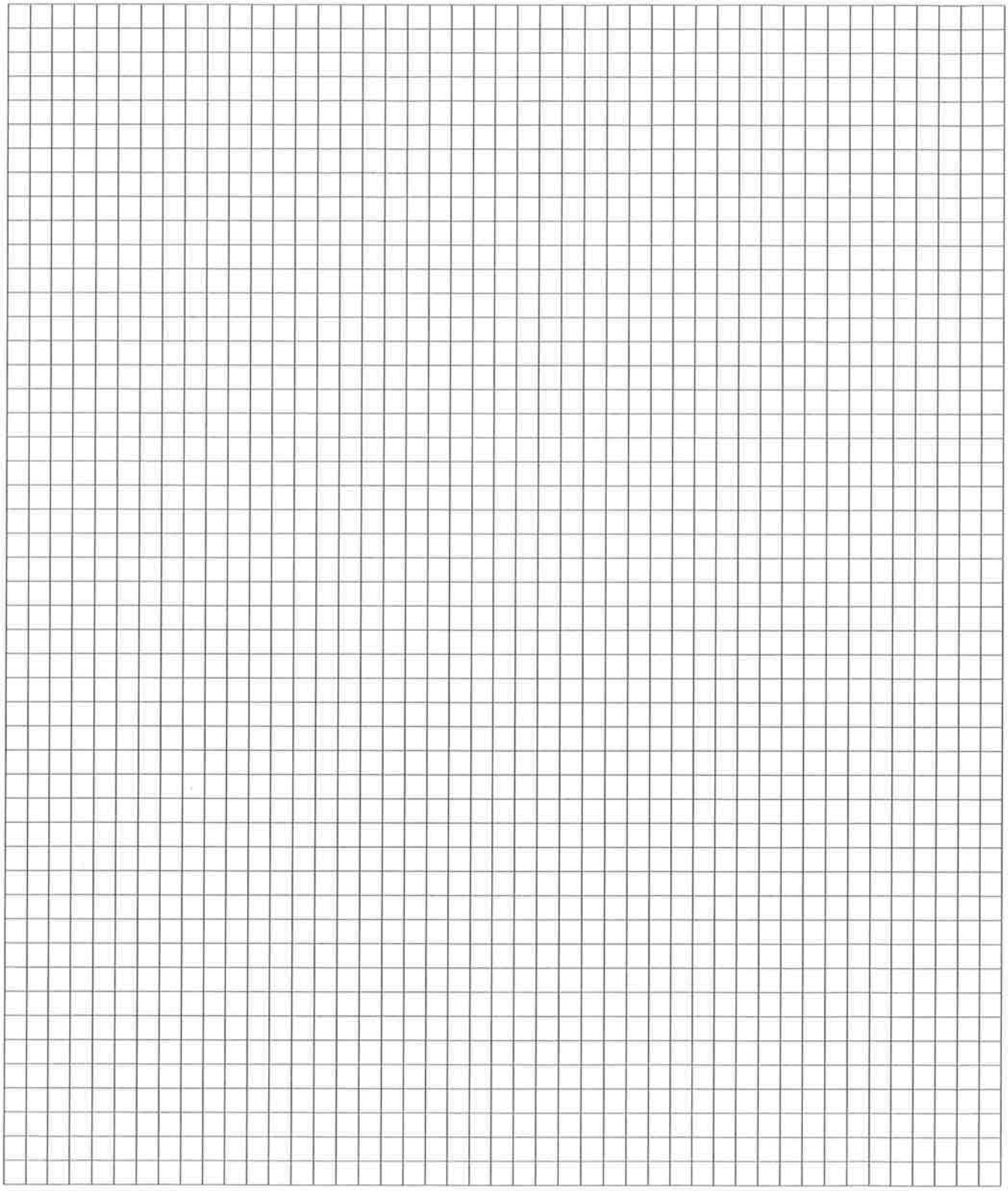
11. I hereby certify, by my signature, that the above information and the plot plan on the next page of this form are accurate and true to the best of my knowledge.

_____

Date Signature of Qualified Septic System Evaluator

Provide a Site Plan in the space below: Show the actual or best estimate measurements of components that were confirmed during this evaluation; septic tank, soil absorption system, property lines (if known), easements (if known), existing structures, driveways, and water supply (water lines and wells). **Draw to scale and indicate the direction north.**

Provide a Plot Plan in the space below: Show the actual or best estimate measurements that locate the existing septic tank, disposal trenches, property lines, easements, existing structures, driveways, and water supply (water lines and wells). **Draw to scale and indicate the direction north.**



Fact Sheet

Septic Tank Maintenance

State of Oregon
Department of Environmental Quality

Water Quality Onsite Program
165 East 7th Avenue
Eugene, OR 97401
Phone: (541) 687-7338
(800) 844-8467
Fax: (541) 686-7551
Contact: Randy Trox
www.oregon.gov/DEQ

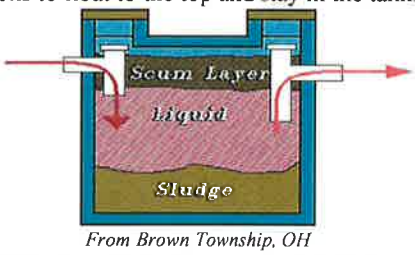
Background

For homes and businesses outside areas served by area-wide sewer systems, sewage is treated and dispersed into the soil by onsite or septic systems. The primary components are a septic tank and a soil absorption area (often a drainfield).

How does a septic tank work?

Sewage contains materials that can shorten the life of a drainfield and cause sewage to back up into a structure or discharge to the ground surface or surface water. Greases & oils, found in kitchen wastewater and household products like fabric softeners, float in the tank. Solids, laundry lint, garbage disposal waste, and other items sent down the drain, make up the sludge layer at the bottom of the tank.

The septic tank accumulates solids from sewage passing through the tank, which allows the solids to settle and scum (grease & oil) to rise to the top above where the baffles in the tank draw the sewage. These solids accumulate and to some extent break down in the septic tank. Detergents cause oils to stay in suspension and time in the septic tank can break them down and allow the oils to float to the top and stay in the tank.



From Brown Township, OH

Allowing too much to accumulate in the tank will shorten the time that incoming sewage is in the septic tank where solids would settle that clog the drainfield.

The drainfield may not fail immediately when a tank full of solids is not pumped. Continued neglect will result in failure of the drainfield, and will need to be replaced. Sewage surfacing exposes humans and animals to disease-causing organisms.

Cleaning the tank

Pumping frequency depends on factors like tank volume, number of people using the system, and nature of sewage (using a garbage disposal, for example) going down the drain. Properly sized septic tanks typically have enough capacity for three to eight years use before pumping is needed. DEQ recommends pumping a septic tank when sludge and scum take up more than 35 percent of the tank volume. Consult your septic tanks manual for how to check sludge volume.

In Oregon, a 1,000 gallon septic tank is required for homes with up to four bedrooms. If four people live in a 4-bedroom house with a 1,000 gallon septic tank, the pumping frequency is on the order of every three years. If the same system serves two people, the frequency would be on the order of every six years. Septic tanks installed before 1979 could be smaller and require a higher pumping frequency. The pumping frequency suggested here is based on Oregon State University Extension Service Circular # 1343, April 2000.

Septic tank pumpers must have a DEQ sewage disposal service license. It is advisable to verify that license and bond are current and check references with prior clients prior to hiring a pumper.

To get all of the solids from the tank the scum layer must be broken up and the sludge layers stirred up into the liquid portion of the tank. The sludge is stirred up by pumping liquid back and forth between the pumper truck and the tank. Once the sludge is stirred, the tank is emptied.

A quality professional will inspect the condition of the tank and the tees or baffles. If repairs to the tank or pipes are needed, the pumper will inform the owner. Repairs may require a permit through the local DEQ office or county.

Many counties administer the septic system program for DEQ. For further information on who to contact in a specific county or on DEQ's program, visit our website at www.oregon.gov/DEQ. Click on "Projects and Programs" then select "Onsite Sewage Disposal." You may also contact the nearest DEQ office or call toll free in Oregon 1-800-452-4011.

Alternative Formats

Alternative formats of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications & Outreach for more information at (503) 229-5696.

Last Updated: 1/03/12
By: Randy Trox
12-WQ-002

TABLE 1

OAR 340-071-0220

MINIMUM SEPARATION DISTANCES

Items Requiring Setback	From Subsurface Absorption Area Including Replacement Area	From Septic Tank and Other Treatment Units, Effluent Sewer and Distribution Units
1. Groundwater Supplies and Wells.	*100'	50'
2. Springs:		
• Upgradient.	50'	50'
• Downgradient.	100'	50'
**3. Surface Public Waters:		
• Year round.	100'	50'
• Seasonal.	50'	50'
4. Intermittent Streams:		
• Piped (watertight not less than 20' from any part of the onsite system).	20'	20'
• Unpiped.	50'	50'
5. Groundwater Interceptors:		
• On a slope of 3% or less.	20'	10'
• On a slope greater than 3%:		
• Upgradient.	10'	5'
• Downgradient.	50'	10'
6. Irrigation Canals:		
• Lined (watertight canal).	25'	25'
• Unlined:		
• Upgradient.	25'	25'
• Downgradient.	50'	50'
7. Manmade Cuts Down Gradient in Excess of 30 Inches (top of downslope cut):		
• Which Intersect Layers that Limit Effective Soil Depth Within 48 Inches of Surface.	50'	25'
• Which Do Not Intersect Layers that Limit Effective Soil Depth.	25'	10'
8.Downgradient Escarpments:		
• Which Intersect Layers that Limit Effective Soil Depth.	50'	10'
• Which Do Not Intersect Layers that Limit Effective Soil Depth.	25'	10'
9.Property Lines.	10'	5'
10. Water Lines.	10'	10'
11. Foundation Lines of any Building, Including Garages and Out Buildings.	10'	5'
12. Underground Utilities.	10'	—

* 50-foot setback for wells constructed with special standards granted by WRD.
**This does not prevent stream crossings of pressure effluent sewers.