

Ohio's Draft Sewage Treatment System Rules

Frequently Asked Questions



Why is Ohio updating the household sewage treatment rules?

- State minimum rules for sewage treatment system construction and operation were adopted in 1977. Local health districts were able to adopt more stringent rules. ODH is required to adopt new rules after January 1, 2012.

Will Everyone in Ohio have to replace their septic tank?

- The rules do not require that all systems must be upgraded. All existing systems are deemed approved under state law until they fail and cannot be repaired.
- The rules establish new modern standards for system construction, alteration and maintenance when a system fails or breaks and must be altered or replaced, or a when a new system is installed.
- System owners can request a timeline for the incremental repair and/or replacement of a failing system. This spreads system replacement costs out over time and also allows the owner to try common sense solutions like installing water saving fixtures, reducing water usage or fixing leaks to reduce flow to the system.
- A wide range of modern design choices and technologies for new or replacement sewage systems are available that provide safe and sustainable treatment in the diverse soils and geology of the state. This promotes healthy communities and safe development in suburban and rural areas not served by public sewers.

Will the new equipment be expensive?

- The draft rules carefully balance the protection of public health and safety from sewage related diseases with system cost and reduce the discharge of nutrients to the environment protecting lakes and streams, and reducing growth of algae.
- Good design options for systems help protect the financial investment of the homeowner in their system. Proper system maintenance ensures systems are sustainable for many years.
- Lower cost, low maintenance systems such as septic tanks to leaching trenches that use the natural soils for treatment are the preferred design and will continue to be the primary system installed in Ohio. New technologies are available for use where the soils present greater challenges for sewage treatment.
- The draft rules combine state standards with options for local flexibility. For example, local health districts can establish a local vertical separation distance between 6 and 18 inches to the seasonal water table, representing the most common limiting condition for soils in the state. This approach will help lower system costs where local conditions can allow more basic system designs.
- Local health districts work directly with homeowners on system permitting, installation, education and monitoring of system maintenance.

Will homeowners get a say before the new rules are put into place?

- ODH convened a rule advisory committee in October, 2010 representing 43 organizations including local health districts, product manufacturers, system installers, service providers, septage haulers, local and state government, homebuilders, realtors, townships, county commissioners, and engineers. The committee met monthly from December 2010 through October 2012 with discussions on related rule topics at each meeting.
- Rule advisory committee meetings were open, served over the internet, and most were audio recorded. Resource materials, notes of committee decisions, and comments were captured and posted on a department website.
- Rule drafts were prepared based on committee discussions and posted on the ODH website in February, 2012; August, 2012, October, 2012 and early December, 2012 allowing an extended review period for most proposed rules.
- The first compiled draft of rules was posted for comment from December 20, 2012 through March 1, 2013. ODH conducted 11 regional meetings in January/Feb. 2013 to discuss the draft rules and obtain comment.
- ODH is posting the 2nd draft for the 30 day public comment period on November 12, 2013. ODH is proposing an effective date for the rules of May 1, 2014.

The 2nd draft sewage treatment system rules (Ohio Administrative Code 3701-29) can be accessed on the ODH website at: www.odh.ohio.gov/HomeSewageRules.

Fix It Before It Fails

Get the Facts



Don't let rumors lead you into expensive repairs and unnecessary sewage system replacements. Ohio's new sewage rules will NOT require everyone in the state to automatically replace their septic system.

The new sewage rules are going into place for several reasons:

- They haven't been updated since 1977
- While some counties have modernized their own rules since then, other counties have not. These rules will set a minimum standard for Ohio homeowners so you can be assured that your neighbor's system is not leaking sewage into your yard- or the ponds, lakes and other waterways that you and your family enjoy.

Rumor	Truth
No septic systems will be grandfathered in ----- If your system was installed before 1974 you will have to replace it	You can keep your system as-is as long as there's not sewage on the top of the ground, missing parts/pieces or backup in your home.
The Ohio Department of Health Report says nearly 1/3 (31%) of all septic systems in Ohio are failing.	If a system is "failing" it could indicate a number of problems, but this doesn't necessarily mean you'll have to replace the entire system to meet the standards in the new rules or the existing state laws- it could just mean replacing missing or broken parts or adding treatment.
This will cost you hundreds of dollars in fees every year	The state will charge up to \$75 to install a new system, \$34 dollars to alter a system and \$0 to get an operation permit. You usually end up paying a little more than that because local health departments also need to charge fees to run these programs (staff, training, etc.). Getting your operation permit could be as easy as taking a receipt to your local health department that shows you hired a registered company to pump your septic tank. Local health districts set the amount and length of the operation permit, which can vary between one and ten years.
You'll have to use new, expensive technology instead of traditional septic systems.	The new rules offer a wide range of technology WHEN it is time to install, replace or alter.
Leach fields are no longer an option.	Septic tank/leach field systems are still allowed under the new rules and are the preferred system where soil conditions are good.

Fix It Before It Fails

Protect Your Pocketbook



Most sewage systems will fail sometime. Just like the roof on your house, a septic system is designed to have a lifetime of about 20-30 years, under the best conditions.

Eventually, the soil around the absorption field becomes clogged with organic material, making the system unusable.

But by far the most common reason for early failure is improper maintenance by homeowners. When a system is poorly maintained and not pumped out on a regular basis, sludge (solid material) builds up inside the septic tank, then flows into the absorption field, clogging it beyond repair.

The most obvious effect is the direct expense of replacing your septic system. This could cost \$8,000 to \$10,000. Systems with motors and parts will need to be serviced over the years, too. Just like you would with any other service professional, be sure to shop around for quotes and references. Your local health department can also tell you which septic system contractors are registered and bonded.

Fees under the proposed rules:

	Installation Fee	Alteration Fee	Operation Permit
State Fee	2014: \$25	2014: \$15	None
	2015: \$50	2015: \$25	
	2016: \$74	2016: \$35	
Local Fee	Set by local health department	Set by local health department	Amount and frequency set by local health department; proposed rules say the maximum operation permit is ten years.

Just like furnace or the roof on your house, your septic system will probably need to be replaced every 20 years- but you can plan for it. As a resident in the country or suburbs, you do not have to pay the average yearly city sewer fee of \$450.

When it is time to replace your system, you could qualify for assistance: Community Development Block Grant Funds, Community Housing Improvement Program and Rural Housing and Rural Utilities Programs are all available resources. For more information, contact your local health department.

Fix It Before It Fails Be a Good Neighbor



Without proper maintenance and good system design, your sewage could go into your neighbor's yard (and their sewage could come into your yard) contaminating the ground water with disease-causing germs like *E.coli*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, polio, hepatitis, *Cryptosporidium*.

In addition to the diseases themselves, mosquitoes and flies that spread some illnesses can breed in areas where liquid waste reaches the surface.

The problems of a failing septic system don't stop at your property line. Sewage and disease can impact the health of your neighbors and your community.

In addition to creeping into the yard next door, contaminants such as *E.coli* can get into our beaches. The Ohio Department of Health has identified home sewage system discharge as a contributing factor to unhealthy bacteria levels at Ohio's beaches. When the levels reach a certain point, the beach must issue an advisory and the beach manager can even close it to the public.

Your septic system won't last forever, but you can extend the life of it and delay expensive replacement with maintenance and replacement of broken parts. Ohio's new sewage system rules DO NOT require everyone to automatically replace their system with new technology. You will have to replace your system WHEN it fails- but that's been the law in Ohio since 1977. These new septic system rules give you more options to fix it before it fails and more ways to prevent sewage from making you, your family, your neighbors and your community sick from the germs of septic waste.

