

## **Panhandle Health District's Sewage Disposal Program Frequently Asked Questions**

The following answers to frequently asked questions are provided for information only. They are not rule or policy and in no way should they be interpreted as such. Because of the many and varied circumstances that can arise, a formal application must be submitted to PHD to receive a decision. If in doubt, contact your local Environmental Health office.

### **PROCESS**

PHD now requires building plans and the associated county building permit application prior to accepting an application for a septic permit. Why isn't a detailed plot plan, showing the building "envelope" or "footprint", adequate?

*A septic permit must be issued based on the detailed information provided in the application. The county building permit demonstrates intent to construct the structure indicated on the application. The detailed information is needed to properly size and locate the septic system.*

Does PHD still perform site evaluations?

*Yes. The site evaluation indicates whether or not the site is suitable for on-site sewage disposal, and expires within one-year of the date it was issued. However the indication of suitability continues to be valid as long as the site conditions remain unchanged.*

I do not plan to build for a while and want to install a system for future use, but want to temporarily connect a shop or temporary mobile home to the system. How do I proceed?

*We can accept an application that is specific to the original use of the system (shop, RV, mobile home, etc.). The septic permit will be issued specific to that application. If/when another structure is planned for the site, a new application must be made and the adequacy of the installed system will be evaluated to determine septic system requirements at the time of application.*

I plan to subdivide a parcel with an existing house on one of the lots. Why do I have to pay the subdivision fee for that lot?

*PHD must assure that the existing residence will have a drainfield and replacement area that will meet current standards, before we can approve the plat. Therefore all lots must be evaluated.*

I am developing lots within a subdivision that was already approved for individual septic systems on each lot. Why is a separate application, and possibly new test holes, needed for the septic permit?

*The approved subdivision indicates that each lot had suitable soils at the time of review, and could be expected to support an on-site sewage disposal system per current regulations. The site must be evaluated under the septic permit program to assure that the site has not been compromised (roads, earthwork, wells, etc), and that the proposed project can be*

*accommodated based on building size, site layout, and wastewater flows. The additional test holes may be needed to properly issue the permit.*

Do you allow repair of failed systems?

*Yes. We issue approximately 250 repair permits for failed septic systems per year. We work with the property owner to find a site that meets current standards, but if that is not possible, we approve a “best fit” system.*

Do you allow use of alternative technologies?

*Yes. The state of Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) has approved use of seven Extended Treatment Package Systems, three of which are distributed, and have approved Operation and Management entities, in the five northern counties. In addition, there are many other less technical alternatives (capping fill, sand filter, two cell, etc.) All alternative systems must be approved by the state. The following web site provides detailed information.  
[http://www.deq.state.id.us/water/assist\\_business/septic/tech\\_manual\\_updates.cfm](http://www.deq.state.id.us/water/assist_business/septic/tech_manual_updates.cfm)*

Why not use percolation tests?

*Idaho’s Individual/Subsurface Sewage Disposal Rules and Technical Guidance Manual require the use of the USDA Field Test Textural Classification to evaluate soils and site suitability. However, percolation tests can be used to confirm findings from site surveys and soil analysis data, or to help make a distinction with a “borderline” soil type.*

Where can I find information on existing septic systems?

*Septic permit information and copies of related documentation can be obtained by conducting a search on the following web site.*

*<http://www2.phd1.idaho.gov/septic2007/search.html>*

*Search criteria includes: Name (applicant, owner, installer), Parcel Number, Section/Township/ Range, Address, or Subdivision (Lot & Block)*

## **EXISTING RULES**

Why is there a 100-foot separation distance from a drainfield to a well, but up to 300-feet from surface water?

*Idaho’s Individual/Subsurface Sewage Disposal Rules establish the separation distances from all features of interest. Panhandle Health District cannot have standards that are less restrictive than the state’s. See IDAPA 58.01.03.008 for more detail.*

Is there a minimum lot size for a drainfield and house?

*No, unless the parcel is located over the Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer where a minimum of five-acres is required. Many factors are evaluated to determine if a particular site is suitable to treat and dispose of wastewater, based on a specific, proposed use.*

I want to remodel my house. Can I connect to the existing septic system?

*Yes, if the current septic system is permitted and meets current standards and no additional bedrooms are being added.*

*If extra bedrooms are being added the septic system will need to be sized to meet the increased loading.*

*If the septic system does not meet current standards the remodel will be limited to no more than a 10% increase in size. See IDAPA 41.01.01.100.06 for more details.*

I have an old house that hasn't been occupied for several years, and do not know what the septic system is. Can I rebuild on this site?

*New construction will need to be served by a septic system that meets current standards.*

## **2007 NEGOTIATED RULEMAKING**

Why is Panhandle Health District proposing a rule change?

*The basis for this negotiated rulemaking process is to evaluate the adequacy of the current bedroom model to reflect actual wastewater flows. We are responsible for implementing the sewage disposal program for individual and subsurface sewage disposal systems to protect public health and our clean water. Once septic systems are installed we live with them for decades and the majority of septic permitted sites will not be connected to a managed sewer system. Prevention is the key: once a public health problem exists, it is very difficult to correct. In preparation for submission of the pending rule for publication in the Idaho Administrative Bulletin we learned that our protracted discussion of the issue did not produce a consensus until it was too late to be processed as a final rule in 2008. Idaho State administrative rule making requires that a proposed rule must be submitted for publication no later than August 24, 2007, to be considered by the 2008 Legislature. Since we had not resolved the differences among our varied interests at that time, **consideration of the proposed change in the Panhandle Health District Health Code by the Legislature must now wait for the 2009 session.***

What if rules change, but I have a septic system that was permitted, installed and approved, but I haven't connected to it yet?

*The conditions described on the septic permit will still apply. At the time that you want to connect to the system, an application for an authorization to connect permit must be made and an evaluation performed to verify that the conditions under which the permit was issued still exist. If the drainfield was installed but not the tank, a tank only permit application must be made in lieu of the authorization to connect application.*

What about care and maintenance of septic systems?

*Care and maintenance of septic systems is vital to their proper functioning. We are currently providing education material with every septic permit. We plan to work with the Realtor community to have the same information provided to purchasers on septic system at the time of closing. The best long-term solution is the creation of a regional sewage management district to cover all areas outside of municipalities.*

What about peak loading?

*A viable method of determining and designing to handle peak flows has not yet been found. We will continue to evaluate this issue.*

What are the regulatory flow standards from other states?

*A chart with a number of states flow standards is available on the PHD website.*