



Fact Sheet

Accessory Dwelling Units and Onsite Wastewater Treatment (Septic) Systems

An accessory dwelling unit is a small residential structure located on the same lot as a single-family dwelling. An ADU can be attached, detached, or built within the main home. It includes areas for cooking, eating, sleeping and a bathroom. It cannot have more than two bedrooms and must meet state and local size limits and planning requirements.

Homes and businesses that do not have access to sewer systems typically use onsite wastewater (septic) systems to treat and dispose of wastewater. ADUs may be built on properties with septic systems. They may use their own septic system or share the main home's system. For reference, projected daily sewage flow for an ADU is 300 gallons per day and the design flow for a home with up to four bedrooms and an ADU is 750 gallons per day.

Not all properties served by septic systems can handle the additional flow of an ADU. A local onsite agent will need to evaluate the property – and if there is an existing system, the capacity and condition of the system – to see if it can support the main home and an ADU. Before submitting an application, you may want to consult with a local septic professional first to identify property constraints and review the size and condition of an existing septic system.

What to know if you are planning an ADU

Step 1: Check with your local planning department to confirm whether an ADU is allowed on your property.

Step 2: Is your property undeveloped or developed?

Undeveloped: You'll need a site evaluation report that approves a property for both a main home and an ADU. Check to see if a report already exists. If not, apply for a new site evaluation with your [local onsite authority](#).

Developed: Check with your local septic authority for records of the existing septic system. Depending on your situation, you may need to apply for a site evaluation or an authorization notice. Consider these factors:

- **Sufficient Area:** Is there enough space for a replacement system for the main house and the ADU?
- **Terrain or site limitations:** Do these make connection to the home's septic system difficult?
- **Capacity:** Is the existing system in good condition and large enough to support flow from an ADU?
- **Modifications:** Can additional components, like tanks or drain lines, be added to the existing system?
- **Uncertainty:** If you are unsure, start with an Authorization Notice with your local onsite agent.

Translation or other formats

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800-452-4011 | TTY: 711 | deqinfo@deq.oregon.gov

November 2025

Building an ADU with a separate septic system

If pursuing a standalone system for the ADU, the first step is to apply for a site evaluation with the local septic authority. The property must have enough space for both initial and replacement areas for the ADU's system, plus a replacement area for the main home. If the main house does not already have a recorded replacement area, or if the original area has been damaged or altered, at least one test pit will need to be dug to identify a suitable replacement area. See [DEQ Site Evaluation Guide](#) for details.

Once the site evaluation is approved, you can apply for a septic permit. Your application must include a signed Land Use Compatibility Statement (LUCS) from your local planning department showing local land use approval, detailed septic system plans for the ADU, and any other documents required by your local septic authority.

Connecting an ADU to an existing system

If you plan to have your ADU share the main home's septic system, start by applying for an authorization notice with the local septic authority. The application requires a signed LUCS, a property development plan, a description of the existing septic system, and any other documents required by your local septic authority.

The local onsite agent reviews this information and conducts a site visit to evaluate if the existing system is in good working order, there is adequate space for future replacement areas for both dwellings, and the added flow is within allowable limits – up to 300 gallons per day or 50% of the system's design capacity, whichever is smaller. If the increase is within these limits and the added flow will not create a public health hazard or pollute water, an authorization notice may be issued. If any part of the system needs modification, an alteration permit will be required. If the increase exceeds these limits, a site evaluation and a septic construction-installation permit will be required.

Building both a main Home and ADU on a vacant lot

If you want to build a main home and an ADU on an undeveloped lot that share one septic system, begin with a site evaluation for 750 gallons per day for up to a four-bedroom home plus an ADU. If the main home and the ADU will have their own septic systems apply for two separate site evaluations.

Program name and contacts

Please visit our [contacts page](#) to find links and names for local entities and the appropriate regional DEQ staff.

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