



Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

Onsite Wastewater (Septic) Rules Update

General Summary – Effective Jan. 1, 2026

DEQ and its contract counties are responsible for administering Oregon Administrative Rules Chapter 340, Divisions 071 and 073, Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Rules. The Environmental Quality Commission has approved the first substantial rule changes since 2014. This fact sheet details housekeeping updates and sewer availability and provides brief summaries of other rule changes. More details on specific topics can be found on these corresponding fact sheets: Operation and Maintenance Requirements, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), Septic System Alternative Treatment Technologies, and Variance Process.

Definitions

- **Major Maintenance** now includes replacing distribution or drop boxes when performed by a certified installer or certified maintenance provider with a Sewage Disposal Service (SDS) license. A Minor Repair permit is no longer needed unless this work is done by the property owner.
- **Design flow** is a modified definition for the maximum amount of sewage a system is designed to handle each day, also called design capacity. It allows for a margin of safety and reserve capacity during times of high flows. Rules now clearly separate design flow from projected daily sewage flow.
- **Projected daily sewage flow** is redefined as the anticipated peak daily quantity of sewage an establishment produces. Projected daily sewage flow may be more, less, or equal to the design flow.
- **Time dosing** is a new definition that allows larger projected daily or weekly sewage flows to be discharged to an absorption area over multiple days at a rate that does not exceed a system's design flow. This method requires adequate storage volume, a control panel with a timer, and floats to activate timer and disable pump in periods of low flows.
- **Large system** is clarified as a system with a design flow greater than 2,500 gallons per day. A system may have a projected daily sewage flow over 2,500 gallons per day and use time dosing to stay at a design flow below 2,500 gallons per day.
- **Municipality** is a new definition that means a city, county, county service district, special service district, sanitary authority or sanitary district. Municipalities are involved with determining sewer availability.

Sewer Availability

Permit denial language now clarifies that:

- Sewer is available if the property is in an area intended for urbanization – within a city limit, urban growth boundary (UGB), or sanitary district.
- To be legally available, the sewer connection must be accessible by a right-of-way or existing easement.
- The municipality determines if a sewer connection is physically practical, legally available under its local ordinances, and the sewer system has capacity. If local ordinances do not establish a physical distance, the OARs continue to provide default distance requirements for sewer availability. Considerations are now given for existing development for projected daily sewage flows up to 899 gallons per day:
 - **For a repair or alteration permit**, the nearest sewer connection point must be within 200 feet.
 - **For a construction-installation permit**, the rules have not changed. The nearest sewer connection point must be within 300 feet.

Translation or other formats

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A written statement from the municipality with sewer authority is required with a septic permit application for any property located within a city limit, urban growth boundary, or sanitary district or equivalent. Emergency repairs are not allowed in these areas unless the sewer authority provides in writing that sewer is not available. DEQ has a sewer availability form for this purpose.

Material Updates

There have been several plumbing code revisions and industry changes since materials were last revised in Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Rules.

Outdated materials removed:

- **Siphons.** Distribution from a dosing septic tank, dosing tank, or other approved pump chamber must use a pump or pumps, and floats.
- **Steel septic tanks.** Steel tanks deteriorate over time, posing a safety hazard.
- **Filter fabric specifications.** The type of filter fabric specified is no longer commonly available. Where filter fabric is required above drain media, filter fabric must be a woven or spun-bonded sheet material used to impede or prevent the movement of sand, silt, and clay into drain media per definitions.

Updated standards:

- **Effluent sewer and header pipe** must be constructed of materials that conform to state building sewer standards. Please note corrugated and smooth wall polyethylene pipe (ASTM Specification F 667 and F 810, Section 9) are no longer approved header pipe materials.
- **Pressure transport pipe, pressure manifolds, pressure lateral pipe, and fittings** must meet or exceed Schedule 40 and be pressure rated. High density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe must be pressure rated under standards referenced in Chapter 17 of the Oregon Plumbing Specialty Code. Any transitional fittings between material must be manufactured for that purpose.
- **Encasement (sleeve) pipe** for reduced setbacks to wells may be Schedule 40 or heavier with solvent or heat welded joints.
- **Curtain drain outlet pipe, tile dewatering outlet pipe and sand filter underdrain piping and fittings** must be Schedule 40 minimum pipe.
- **Half-pipe material** may be half sections of 12-inch diameter plastic irrigation pipe or an equivalent pipe material with similar durability and strength as determined by the agent.
- **The base of a sand filter must be underdrain media** (Half-inch pea gravel that meets required specifications). Drain media is no longer allowed. Because underdrain media is now required, filter fabric has been removed from sand filter construction standards.

Evaluations, Authorization Notices, Permitting, and Inspections

- An agent may require a new site evaluation if the existing record lacks enough information to determine the approval area for the proposed system.
- An individual with a current NAWT inspector training and certification accreditation must now have a SDS license to complete an Existing System Evaluation Report.
- Authorization notices for an increase in projected daily sewage flow require adequate replacement area for all systems on the property.
- If an authorization notice is denied because the proposed increase exceeds 50% of the design flow or 300 gallons per day, the fees may now be applied toward the site evaluation or construction-installation permit fee at the discretion of the local agent.
- Pressure distribution, sand filter, and alternative treatment technology (ATT) systems each have a list of required inspections. The agent may still elect to waive certain inspections.

- An agent may now require a start-up from a certified operations and maintenance provider for any pressure distribution, sand filter, or alternative treatment technology system. Where manufacturer-provided start-up forms are not available, start-ups must be completed on a DEQ-approved form.
- Reduced seepage bed sizing is now available following a sand filter or ATT with a minimum sizing of 70 square feet per 150 gallons per day.

Operation and Maintenance (O&M)

All O&M rules have been moved to the new Operation and Maintenance section: [OAR 340-071-0132](#). Changes have been made to contract requirements, maintenance provider and property owner responsibilities, compliance recovery fees, and alternative system inspections. Details of changes can be found in the [Operation and Maintenance Requirements Fact Sheet](#).

Accessory Dwelling Units

An accessory dwelling unit, or ADU, is a new definition that means a residential structure that is used in connection with or accessory to a single-family dwelling. It must be located on the same lot or parcel as the single-family dwelling, not exceed two bedrooms and size limitations of state or local land use regulations, and include provisions for cooking, eating, sleeping and sanitation. The minimum design flow for an ADU is 300 gallons per day. The minimum design flow for a single-family dwelling plus an ADU is 750 gallons per day. Details of changes can be found in the [Accessory Dwelling Units Fact Sheet](#).

Nutrient and Nitrate Loading and Treatment

Septic systems can release nutrients and nitrates into groundwater and drinking water sources, which can harm both human health and the environment. Some areas of Oregon are particularly susceptible to nutrient and nitrate contamination due to rapidly draining soils, shallow depth to groundwater, and high development density. New rules allow agents to consider nitrate and other nutrient pollution when reviewing sites, and to require extra design or treatment in sensitive areas. Agents may require specific DEQ-approved ATT models proven to provide better nutrient and nitrate treatment, based on the best available science, in these sensitive areas.

Variance

Updated variance rules require that a 'for cause' variance can only be approved if the system design protects public health and the environment as much as, or more than, the prescriptive standards in Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Rules. The rules clarify that the system owner must follow all variance conditions, including any sampling or reporting requirements, at the sole cost of the property owner. If a for cause variance proposal is denied, an appeal hearing will now be conducted as a contested case hearing rather than in circuit court to streamline the process for both parties.

Contacts

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

Non-discrimination statement

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