



Fact Sheet

When DEQ Requires a Water Pollution Control Facilities Permit for Septic Systems in Oregon

The transition from when a permit can be issued by a local agent – usually a county – and when a facility must be permitted by DEQ with a Water Pollution Control Facilities Permit is generally clear. Sometimes the local entity and DEQ need additional information, primarily the projected daily sewage flow and the strength of the wastewater, to determine if the local entity or DEQ is the appropriate permitting agency.

Permit types

There are two types of permits for facilities that utilize septic systems to manage their domestic wastewater disposal needs.

Construction permit – These include permits for new construction as well as permits for alterations and repairs. They are valid for up to one year and in many areas of the state issued by a local government entity, typically a county.

WPCF permit – This is an operating permit rather than an installation permit, though the permit is required to construct a system. They are issued for up to 10 years and must be renewed for the life of the system. This permit has compliance limits for sewage flow and waste strength that usually has monitoring requirements that are recorded and submitted to DEQ. Plan submittal has additional requirements as to who can design a system and how it is inspected and finalized.

Projected daily sewage flow

A WPCF permit is required when an entire facility has a combined projected daily sewage flow of over 2,500 gallons per day. For existing facilities not currently under a WPCF permit, you are not required to obtain a WPCF permit until a major repair, major alteration, or system expansion occurs. Examples of major repairs and alterations include fixing a failing system by replacing a drainfield and relocating a drainfield to expand a parking lot.

Quantities of sewage flows can be found in Oregon Administrative Rules 340-071 Table 2 ([link below](#)). Sometimes a single facility may have multiple flow sources, such as an RV park with a restaurant. In that example, flows are determined by the number of RV spaces, whether there are sewer hookups and restaurant sizing by seats and the type of restaurant. If a facility needs to replace a septic tank and is currently not under a WPCF permit, that tank replacement may be permitted with a repair permit through the county.

Systems larger than 2,500 gallons per day are defined as 'large systems' and have some additional permitting requirements as outlined in OAR 340-071-0520 ([link below](#)). One of the primary rules in this section requires providing a groundwater assessment for DEQ review and drainfield design standards that are unique to

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discharging larger volumes of wastewater effectively. The intent of the groundwater assessment is to ensure that these large systems are designed adequately to protect the quality of public waters and public health.

Waste strength

Waste strength is another primary factor in determining if a WPCF permit is needed. What might create high strength wastewater? Grease and oils, food service waste like coffee and milk products, food waste from a restaurant scraped down the drain, and harsh chemicals are some possible contributors for high waste strength.

A proposed facility that will generate high waste strength sewage must lower the waste strength before it enters the septic system through some form of pretreatment.

Passive pretreatment would be when there are no moving parts, such as a grease interceptor tank. Those may be permitted by local DEQ or local government for flows of 2,500 gallons per day or less. It may require a large tank or multiple tanks to adequately lower the waste strength, and those tanks will need frequent pumping to successfully maintain manageable waste strength.

Active pretreatment has aeration or other components that operate or have moving parts to lower waste strength. Permitting a facility with active pretreatment requires obtaining a WPCF permit.

Making a determination on waste strength may require additional information, such as a proposed food and beverage menu, or a discussion between DEQ onsite staff and a local inspector to determine the appropriate permit and entity to oversee the project.

Oregon Administrative Rules

These are the Oregon Administrative Rules mentioned above regarding onsite wastewater treatment system design flow and large system rules:

- [Oregon Administrative Rules \(OAR\) 340-071 Table 2](#) See Table 2 Quantities of Sewage Flow in linked PDF.
- [OAR 340-071-0520](#) Large Systems.

Onsite Wastewater Management Program

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

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