OTTAWA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SEPTIC SYSTEMS

What is a Home Sewage Treatment System (HSTS)?
A HSTS is a system that is used to properly treat and dispose of the sewage that comes from the house. “Treat” means to kill all harmful pathogens, which includes bacteria, viruses, parasites, and all manners of things that can harm you. “Dispose” means that the wastewater goes where you won’t see it again.

What is sewage?
Sewage is any liquid waste that comes from toilets, bathtubs, washing machines, floor drains or other sanitary fixtures. This does not include water from the sump pump or water softener which may be harmful to the HSTS.

Do I have to install a HSTS if sanitary sewer is available?
No, in fact if the foundation of your home is 200 feet or less from the right-of-way of an accessible sewer line then you are required to tap to the sewer line.

I am thinking about buying a new piece of property to build a new house. How do I find out if the property is approved for a HSTS?
First, find out if the property has sanitary sewer available. If so, you must contact the authority of the sanitary sewer to make arrangements for tap-ins. If sanitary sewer is not available, you must contact a certified soil scientist to have them evaluate the soil and determine if the soils of the property can properly treat and dispose of the wastewater.

How do I find a certified soil scientist?
You may find a list of certified soil scientists from the Association of Ohio Pedologists at the following website link http://www.ohiopedologists.org/.

What services do soil scientists provide and how much do their services cost?
Soil scientists are trained to analyze the characteristic of the soil to determine if soil will allow the movement of water down through the soils and be able to remove harmful pathogens. Soil scientists also evaluate the depth of the seasonal water table, which is hard for most untrained people to determine, but is an important factor in proper treatment of waste water. Fees vary between soil scientists, but expect to pay $300 or more for their services. It is best to get several quotes before making your final decision on who will evaluate the soil.

A certified soil scientist has evaluated the soils, what is the next step?
Once a detailed soil analysis has been completed by a certified soil scientist, you are now ready to have the HSTS designed based on the type of soils and the hydrological features of your piece of property.
How can I find a sewage system designer?
A sewage system designer can be found on the Ottawa County website at www.ottawahealth.org or you may pick up a list of designers at the health department. Some sewage treatment companies that specialize in sewage treatment components also offer design services.

What services do sewage system designer provide?
A sewage system designer must be able to design systems in accordance to the layout of your property, the soil type as determined by a soil scientist, and any other limitations on your property such as slopes and waterways. Designers must provide detailed plans that provide several options of sewage system types and components that will work on your soils.

What is the price range for sewage system designs?
Cost of sewage system designs may vary greatly depending on the level of certification a designer has and the amount of details that must go into certain types of sewage systems. Some soil scientists are also able to design systems and may charge less money to do both soil survey and designs.

What questions should I ask a sewage system designer?
It is very important to work with a designer to evaluate the different system types available for your property. Most lots can accommodate more than one system design with varying types of components. You should ask what it will cost to design a system and if there will be any additional charges if the system must be redesigned or altered. You should also ask if the designer will be available and provide oversight of the system as it is being installed.

I already have a soil analysis completed and a sewage system design for my property, why do I have to apply for a site evaluation?
It is required that the health department sanitarian evaluate the property and compare with the data provided on the soil analysis and the sewage system design to ensure that all requirements of the sewage rules have been met. In addition, the health department will verify that all isolation distances from neighboring wells and property lines have been met. You must make application for the site evaluation prior to obtaining an installation permit.

How long is a site evaluation/review good for?
All site evaluation is applied for and approved by the health department prior to January 1, 2012 are valid for 3 years from the date of approval and will remain on file at the health department until you are ready to apply for an installation permit. If an installation permit is not obtained prior to the expiration date, you will be required to make new application, submit new plans, and submit new fees if you are still planning on installing a HSTS. Site evaluations that are applied for and approved after January 1, 2012 will be valid 2 years until new rules and laws are adopted indicating otherwise.

What is the cost of the site evaluation application?
Please contact the Ottawa County Health Department at (419) 734-6800 for the current site evaluation application cost.
What is the installation permit?
After your site evaluation has been approved, you must get the installation permit prior to having the HSTS installed and before the site evaluation expires. It is very important that you have this permit before any construction on your HSTS begins. The law requires the health department to assess a 25% penalty fee if a system is installed without an approved permit.

How long is an installation permit good for?
The installation permit is good until January 1, 2013 if issued by the health department prior to January 1, 2012. Installation permits issued after January 1, 2012 are good for one (1) year.

What types of HSTS are commonly installed in this region?
Due to changes in the law, the traditional type systems such as subsurface sandfilter beds and leach fields are no longer acceptable for installation in most areas. Most systems installed now are “special device” approved systems that are mounds with pressurized dosing or “drip irrigation” among others. These types of systems are installed to treat the wastewater above the seasonal water table to prevent contamination of ground water.

What is “Special Device” approval?
“Special Device” systems are sewage systems that differ in the design criteria as set forth in the sewage rules, but allow for installation in areas of high seasonal water table such as our region. Most systems now installed in our region are approved under “special device”.

What is the seasonal high water table?
It is a situation where soil is temporarily saturated with water. It can be at certain parts of the year such as spring or fall or during temporary high rain events. Our region is known to have a very high seasonal water table because of the structure of our soil types and has an average depth from 6” to 0” from the ground surface.

How much do HSTS cost?
The cost of HSTS may vary greatly depending on size and type of system. Most systems in this region have seen prices range from $9,000 to $15,000 for installation.

Why are sewage systems sized based on number of bedrooms?
A sewage system must be sized to adequately treat the amount of wastewater discharged from a home and to prevent a nuisance. Bedrooms are the best determining factor that reflects the number of people that potentially live in a home. The rules also state that a den, study, or offices are rooms that might reasonably be used as a sleeping room and are considered bedrooms.

How do I find a contractor to install the HSTS?
Contractors that install or repair sewage systems in Ottawa County must be registered with the health department. Sewage system installers can be found on the Ottawa County website at www.ottawahealth.org or you may pick up a list of installers at the health department.
Are aeration sewage systems or other off-lot discharging systems permitted for new installation?
Recently, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) banned any off-lot discharging sewage systems for new installations unless it is approved to meet National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) effluent water quality standards. Unless an aeration system has been approved to be installed as NPDES, it can not be installed.

What is an NPDES?
An NPDES is a system that allows the local health department to permit installation of sewage systems that discharge off-lot into the water of the states as long as the sewage systems have been approved to meet certain effluent water quality standards as determined by the OEPA.

What type of sewage system is approved under NPDES?
Most sewage systems that are approved under the NPDES consist of mechanical aeration system that uses air to oxidize and decompose sewage as a method of treatment. In addition, these systems have UV lights or other components to further treat the waste water before it can discharge off-lot. All NPDES must be approved by Ohio Department of Health and meet the effluent standards as required by law. A complete list of NPDES approved systems can be found at www.odh.ohio.gov.

How can I get a NPDES permit to discharge?
NPDES can be installed for existing lots (created prior to January 1, 2007) and for replacement of failed systems if no other on-lot sewage systems can be installed. The health department must rule out and make the final determination that no other possible on-lot treatment systems exist before permitting the installation of an NPDES approved systems. However, NPDES sewage system can not be installed for any new construction of homes on new lots created after January 1, 2007.

If the health department permits a NPDES approved sewage system for my property, what steps do I need to take?
Once the health department determines that the only system you can install is a NPDES, you must make application with the OEPA along with $200 payment. Once OEPA reviews and approves the application, you are now ready to get an installation permit from our office as described above.

Are there any other requirements with NPDES?
Once you have a NPDES installed, you are required to have an annual service contract for a service provider to maintain the NPDES. NPDES have mechanical components and other parts that have to be maintained regularly to function properly. You will also be required to have the NPDES sampled annually.

Where can I find more information on sewage systems?
Information regarding sewage systems can be found on the health department website at www.ottawahealth.org. More information can also be found on the Ohio Department of Health website at www.odh.ohio.gov. We can help answer any questions you may have by contacting us at 419-734-6800 or email us at ochdeh@cros.net. You may also visit our office at 1856 E. Perry Street, Port Clinton between the hours of 7:45 am and 4:30 pm Monday through Friday.