Fact Sheet

Improving the Onsite Septic Systems Program: Policy Package #120

State of Oregon
Department of Environmental Quality

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DEQ is a leader in restoring, maintaining and enhancing the quality of Oregon's air, land and water.

Introduction

More than 30 percent of Oregonians dispose of wastewater from their homes and businesses through septic systems. The siting, design, installation and ongoing operation and maintenance of septic systems are regulated by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. Without proper oversight, septic systems can fail or malfunction, and pollute land and waters, creating a public health hazard. DEQ manages the program in 14 counties, and 22 counties manage the program under contract with DEQ.

Fees by individuals and businesses with septic systems, products, or licenses fund Oregon's onsite septic system program. Unfortunately, fee revenues fall short of the amount needed to support an onsite program that can meet service needs that the public and regulated community expect.

DEQ convened an external advisory committee in 2009 to help provide direction on program funding strategies and address other regulatory and administrative concerns with the onsite septic system program. The committee's full report can be found on DEQ's website at: http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/onsite/docs/AdvisoryCommitteeFinalReport20100208.pdf

This policy package would implement several of the committee's recommendations. It also allows DEQ to meet federal requirements under the Coastal Zone Management Act, which is required in order for DEQ to continue to receive nonpoint source pollution prevention grants from the federal government. The area covered by the act includes everything from the top of the Coast Range westward, as well as the entire Rogue and Umpqua basins, which encompass all of Douglas, Jackson and Josephine counties.

Proposed program improvements

If approved, this program package would allow DEQ to do rulemaking to implement the following proposed changes:

♦ Require septic tank inspections and report submittal to DEQ at time of property transfer (federal requirement) and require reporting of septic tank pumping events to DEQ to verify proper management and disposal of septage. These requirements would be effective only in the coastal zone area but may be considered for statewide application in the future. Reporting fee would range from $25 for electronic submittals to $75 for paper reports.

♦ Double the permit and license fees for violators caught installing or modifying a septic system without a permit or performing sewage disposal services without a license.

♦ Adjust or adopt new fees for selected Alternative Treatment Technology (ATT) system services to better reflect workloads associated with product review and oversight.

♦ Expand maintenance program requirements for complex systems to include sand filters and pressurized distribution drainfields. These systems require regular maintenance to operate properly. The requirement would be triggered only when a permit is being applied for and be similar to what is already in place for ATTs and other complex septic systems.

♦ Establish a fee ($30 to $50) for consultations related to land-use planning activities. Building and planning departments require applicants to obtain approval from DEQ's direct service counties, even when no DEQ permit review is required. Most county-run programs have already adopted this type of fee.

What happens next?

The policy package is in DEQ's draft agency budget to be presented for consideration in the Governor's budget. This policy package may be adopted as presented, modified or not included in the agency budget that the 2011 Legislature will act on.

Alternative formats

Alternative formats of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications and Outreach, Portland, at 503-229-5696, or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, x5696.

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