SEPTIC SYSTEM Planning

PLANNING FOR A NEW HOME

When buying property for a new home, it pays to plan ahead, especially if the property does not have public sewer. Most homes in rural and outlying suburban areas depend on individual septic systems for wastewater disposal. In the excitement of planning the appearance of your future living space, it is easy to overlook practicalities like the diposal of your family's wastes. Review this fact sheet for answers to the following questions:

- ☑ What is included in a household septic system?
- ☑ What should be considered before buying property that will need a septic system?
- ☑ What are some of South Carolina's regulations involving septic system permitting and installation?

Remember, it pays to plan ahead!

Did you know... that to get electrical service to your home, your installed septic system must get final approval from the health department?

WHAT IS A SEPTIC SYSTEM?

Most residential septic systems consist of a 1,000 gallon capacity watertight septic tank buried in the ground, and a drainfield that can fit within the front or back yard of a homesite. Household wastewaters from the kitchen, bathrooms and laundry area flow into the septic tank where the solids are retained. The liquid flows out of the tank to the drainfield where it leaches through the soil and is treated before reaching the groundwater.

Unfortunately, not all soils can absorb wastewater or provide adequate treatment. Septic systems installed in unsuitable soils usually malfunction by leaking raw, untreated sewage to the ground surface, ditches or creeks, or by contaminating the groundwater. Untreated sewage may contain deadly bacteria and viruses. It can be expensive to remedy the potential health hazards and odor problems that result from the use of septic systems in unsuitable soils.

South Carolina state law requires a comprehensive soil and site evaluation by the county health department to determine the suitability of the soils and the topography of the lot. A Permit to Contruct must be obtained from the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) before construction begins on the home or the septic system.

REVIEW PROPERTY BEFORE BUYING

Before purchasing a lot for your home, review the lot yourself. Pay particular attention to any feature that could affect the installation or operation of a septic system.

- ☑ Are there gullies, ravines, excessively steep slopes or other severe topographical conditions?
- ☑ Is the land prone to flooding? Are there rivers or streams near the property that are likely to flood?
- ☑ Does the land seem to be wet or to hold water? Does surface drainage seem to be a problem?
- ☑ Does the land contain designated wetlands? Has the extent of any designated wetlands been mapped on the property?

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REVIEW PROPERTY BEFORE BUYING (continued)

- ☑ Are any parts of the land rocky? Bedrock near the ground surface could make the land unsuitable for a septic system.
- ☑ Is there enough space on the lot for a home, the septic system, the driveway, water-supply well, etc.? *See the chart below for the required minimum separation distances.*

Even if the land appears to be okay during your review, there may be conditions under the surface of the ground that make it difficult or impossible to install an adequate septic system. The only way to be sure is to ask your county health department to conduct a thorough evaluation of the property and determine its suitability for a system.

As you can see, there are many factors involved with evaluating property. *Keep in mind that the location of the septic system takes priority over the location of the house and other improvements.* This is to assure that the best soils are used in treating your household wastewater in order to protect your family's health and the environment.

SEPARATION DISTANCES FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS

DISTANCE FROM	MINIMUM DISTANCE
building	5 ft.
property lines	5 ft.
private well	50 ft.
public well	100 ft.
surface water	50 ft.
drainage ditch	25 ft.

**** Based on South Carolina Regulations as of 1996. Additional separation distances are required for certain types of alternative systems. Check with your county health department for any changes or additional local restrictions.***

Did you know... property that does not meet the standards for a conventional system ***may require a more expensive alternative system?*** This can increase the cost of your system by **$1,000 to $10,000** or more, and require a larger land area for the system. Maintenance costs may also increase.

GETTING YOUR PERMIT

So now that you have reviewed your property, you are ready to apply for a Permit to Construct. Here are some steps to take to apply for your permit:

- ☑ Get a permit application from your county health department and ask about any other required permits (from the local planning and zoning office) and fees.
- ☑ Mark all of the property corners and stake the corners of proposed buildings and the center of the lot with easily seen markers.
- ☑ Display the site locater card at the front of your property so it can be easily seen.
- ☑ Make a sketch showing the dimensions and locations of your proposed and existing house, driveway, pool, other buildings, septic system and well. Be sure to include distances from proposed buildings to road and property lines.
- ☑ Find out the locations of wells on adjoining property and include on your sketch.
- ☑ Provide complete detailed information on the application and include any plats or deeds required. Include the tax map number.

PROTECTING YOUR INVESTMENT

Once you have installed your new septic system, don't forget about it! With proper maintenance, a septic system can last for 20 to 30 years. Maintenance involves regular inspections and pumping of accumulated solids out of the septic tank. It also involves disposal of types and amounts of waste that your system is designed to handle. See the companion publication on Septic System Maintenance for more information.

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF OCEAN AND COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
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