



P R E S S R E L E A S E

COUNTY OF SONOMA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 14, 2009

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Sonoma County Implements New, Simpler Process for Septic System Permits

SANTA ROSA, Calif. - At its meeting today (7/14), the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved changes to two county policies dealing with septic systems during the process of remodeling or building an addition onto a structure. The new guidelines, proposed by the Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD), are designed to be much simpler than the former ones, and should make the process easier for everyone involved.

The county's *Guidelines for Remodeling and Additions with Respect to Septic Systems*, more commonly known as the "Remodel Policy," have been in effect since 1992. The guidelines were initially adopted because remodeling and additions to structures can increase the burden on existing septic systems. Therefore, systems may need to be updated at the time of the remodeling or addition. The former guidelines required the use of a complicated formula involving the percentage of altered linear wall footage, combined with the percentage of new habitable square footage involved in the project. This method was difficult and frustrating, and often called for a septic upgrade that was impossible due to property constraints, thus limiting the scope of the building project.

Under the new guidelines, remodel and addition work will be divided into major and minor categories. In all cases, an evaluation of the system will be performed by PRMD staff or a qualified professional. Major projects, which involve replacement of 50% or more of the

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--- Sonoma County Permit Process (cont.) ---

exterior walls, will require the “best available system” based on the scope of the project and site constraints. Minor projects, like small additions or interior remodeling of existing structures will only require confirmation of an existing, properly functioning septic system. There may be situations, such as severely constrained sites or setback problems, which could lead to a “best available system” requirement for smaller projects.

“Septic systems are not a ‘one size fits all’ proposition,” said PRMD Director Pete Parkinson. “Even the old formula driven system, which tried to address that fact, often yielded results that were unworkable,” he said. “We want to ensure that an appropriate and effective system is present, one that takes into account all of the variables of the structure and the site.”

The Board’s action today approved the new guidelines and amended the companion Approval Criteria for Issuance of Septic System Repair Permits. The new guidelines are expected to speed up the permitting process, in many cases making them available “over the counter.” Users should also find the process easier to understand and navigate. Before being proposed to the Board, these guidelines were reviewed and recommended by the Land Use Advisory Panel, which consists of stakeholders from the real estate, contracting, engineering, and septic system industries.

The County of Sonoma is comprised of 26 departments and agencies that provide a full range of services to the community. It encompasses over 1600 square miles and is home to more than 475,000 residents. Sonoma County government has a history of providing excellent and responsive public service while operating under sound fiscal principles.

Located less than one hour north of San Francisco, Sonoma County combines in one location the beautiful Pacific coastline, award-winning wineries, majestic redwoods, historic towns, fine dining, and a wide variety of entertainment and cultural activities.

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