

NONSTANDARD SEPTIC SYSTEM NEWS 2004

Program History

Sonoma County has many types of problem soils and conditions not suitable for standard sewage disposal systems. The U.S.D.A. Soils Survey Book has demonstrated that over 90% of the land mass in Sonoma County is unsuitable for standard septic systems. Without an approved means of sewage disposal and a source of water, parcels cannot be developed.

In 1978 the Sonoma County Public Health Department and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board entered into a policy known as the "Joint Innovative Waste Treatment and Disposal System Agreement". This agreement became a procedure used by both agencies to evaluate specific proposals for the installation and use of nonstandard septic systems in Sonoma County. A similar agreement was implemented with the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board by resolution of the Board of Supervisors in May of 1994. The criteria outlined in the Joint Innovative Agreement called for design concepts of nonstandard systems to incorporate: 1) The prevention of transmission of disease; 2) disposal of sewage and sewage effluent below the surface of the ground; and 3) the prevention of contamination of groundwater and other beneficial water by discharges from sewage disposal systems. We are required, by both Water Quality Control Boards, to monitor the function and maintenance of all septic systems under Operational Permits in this County.

On February 5, 1991, Ordinance 4330 was passed by the Board of Supervisors providing for Operational Permits for nonstandard, onsite wastewater disposal systems in Sonoma County. The permit fees are used to administer the monitoring program. As of 2003 there were over 2800 sites with nonstandard systems, and of those approximately 1800 are in operating status. There were 175 new systems added to the program inventory in 2003.

We ask you, the homeowner, to monitor your system twice a year. The information you give us helps in site evaluation and also enables us to catch any problem(s) early enough so they can be resolved before any major damage and expense might occur. For example, replacement of a mound septic system could cost \$25,000-\$30,000!!! As part of the program, we will monitor your system annually (unless you are on a Reduced Fee Permit) to ensure that, in our professional opinion, the system is functioning properly, and with the idea that if we spot a problem, repair cost will be minimal.

Self-Monitoring Forms

The self-monitoring forms are sent out twice a year (February and September) and need to be returned by the end of the following month (March and October)*. The information we receive on the form helps us to evaluate how the systems are doing, and also gives us a chance to spot any problems. When problems are spotted early, they can be remedied quickly and end up saving you, the homeowner, money. For example, if you have a leaking toilet you are not aware of, you could be introducing hundreds of gallons of water daily to the system. With the cost of system replacement being \$25,000- \$30,000, a small expense now will save a tremendous amount of money later.

It is especially important that the March monitoring form be returned by the end of the month. For one thing, we can ascertain if your tanks are water tight or if they are leaking. For another, we can see how the ground water is fluctuating during the "wet weather portion" of the year. Any March monitoring forms that are received past the due date will not be of help to the homeowner seeking a Reduced Fee Permit. This is because the data for the "wet weather portion" of the year will not be valid.

***- Please perform your monitoring in the months of March and October.**

Suggestions from the Monitoring Program

We strongly urge all homeowners to keep a file of their septic system. Items to include in this file would be copies of past monitoring reports, your operational permit, receipts for monitoring or work performed by a septic system contractor, correspondence to and from this department, etc. If you want to start a system file and would like to retrieve monitoring data on your system, please visit our Records Counter here at the PRMD.