



Go With The Flow



Nonstandard Systems Monitoring Program
Permit & Resource Management Dept.

WINTER/SPRING 2009

Annual Homeowner's Class

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2009

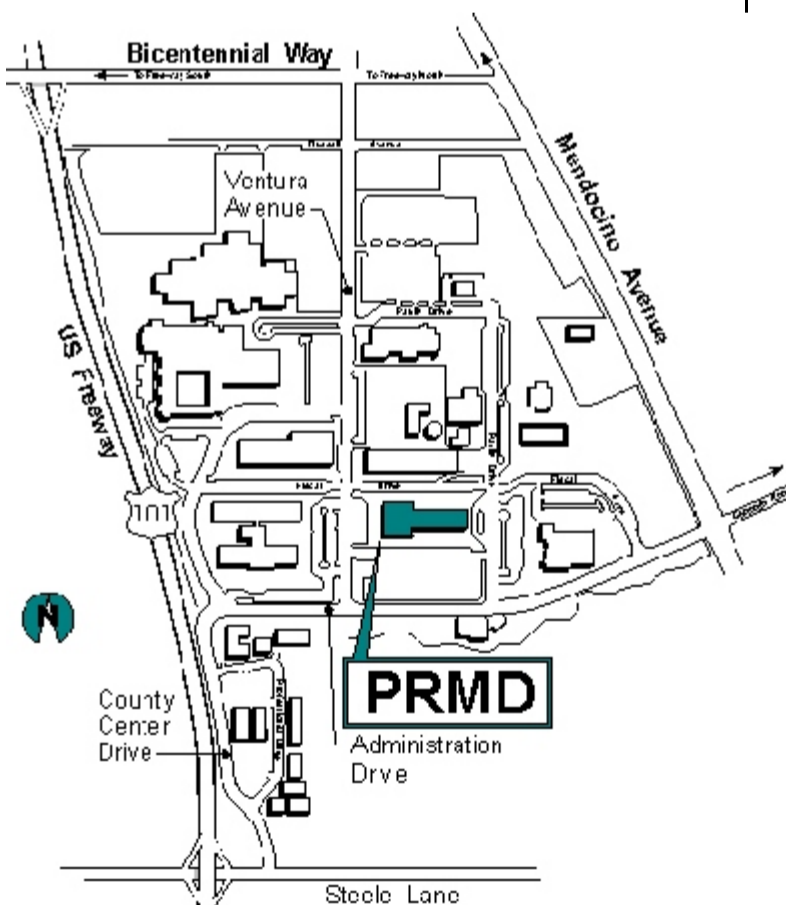
2550 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa CA

Speakers from the Permit & Resource Management Department and the private sector will discuss monitoring techniques, routine maintenance and landscape ideas for your system. Questions are encouraged. Handouts will be available. Emphasis will be on maintenance and a separate discussion and display will be held after 12:00pm for owners of alarm boxes with timers serving equipment such as Advantex units. An Advantex unit will be available for observation. Eric Moody of Pace Plumbing Supply will be available to answer questions.

"Greg the Gopher Guy" (12:00 - 1:00)
How to deal with your gopher population!

Make your reservations early as space is limited!! Please contact Carrie Muller at (707) 565-2658 between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday to make your reservation. You may also leave a voice mail message at this number.

REFRESHMENTS & DOOR PRIZES!!!



NEW OWNERSHIP? NEW SYSTEM?

Have you purchased a home with a nonstandard system? Is your nonstandard system new? If so, it is our goal to familiarize you with the requirements of your Operational Permit "in the beginning" - often new owners call us in March and October when they receive monitoring forms; they have no idea what to do. In addition, new owners have expressed concern when they receive inspection letters from us pointing out noncompliance due to lack of self monitoring or inaccurate/incomplete submittals. We are available to provide any information and instruction that you need.

INFORMATION: Bulletin **WLS-014 Self monitoring** describes the field procedures (ie. measurements, panel inspection) and form completion. This bulletin is part of the packet mailed to new owners (see others bulletins below).

INSTRUCTION: Our staff are available to demonstrate and/or review the self monitoring process with you at your property. Please call us to schedule an appointment.

The following additional bulletins are also available upon request or on our website:

<http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/docs/handouts/ws.htm>:

- WLS-012 Maintenance of Non-Standard Systems
- WLS-013 Maintenance Guidelines for Toilets
- WLS-014 How to Monitor a Non Standard System
- WLS-015 Purging and Balancing
- WLS-016 Reduced Annual Operational Permit Fee
- WLS-017 Plant selection

DO YOU KNOW YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM?

What do you have?; what/where is the expansion area?; how do you maintain it?; how can problems be prevented? This newsletter touches on these issues. Knowledge and preventative measures will help prolong the life of your system and help protect ground and surface water resources.

OUT OF SIGHT - OUT OF MIND? EXPANSION /RESERVE AREA

As the owner of a 'non-standard septic system', the *septic area* on your property consists of 'both' a *primary system area* and an *expansion or reserve area*. The primary area is where the system serving the home/business is installed. The expansion or reserve area is designated for new installation if/when the primary system has major problems or fails - the soils investigation and testing performed on your property included both areas so as to identify the most suitable soils and conditions for onsite sewage disposal - present and future.

The amount of reserve area required (100% or 200%) is based on the type of system as well as the date the lot was created. Some systems, installed as repair

systems, have no designated expansion. Reserve areas can be designed with the same type of system or a different system; they can be adjacent to the primary system or in a completely different area. We want to emphasize the importance of protecting and preserving the expansion area(s); disturbance and/or impact to the soils can render it unsuitable for future use. You might consider erecting a fence around the primary and expansion; the enclosure should include the particular setbacks that apply to your system. **Please note that the setbacks for the primary system also apply to the expansion area.**

For setback information, please see Policy Number 9-2-8 Regulations for Design, Construction, Repair, and Operation of Non-standard Sewage Disposal Systems Pursuant to Sonoma County Code Chapters 7 and 24 on our website:

www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/docs/policies/9-2-8.pdf

PROBLEMS OBSERVED IN EXPANSION AREAS

- Horse corrals
- Riding arenas
- Landscaping and farming activities that involve removal (grading); addition (fill placement); and/or compaction of native soils
- Pavement or gravel base parking and/or driving areas
- Motocross courses
- Basketball, bocce ball, tennis courts
- Sheds or other structures (cement slab)
- Animal pen (large/heavy animals)
- Artificial ponds
- Drainage features
- Patios and decks

WHAT HAPPENS?

If upon inspection the area has been determined to have been altered or compromised, the owner is faced with: 1) a change in the classification of the system (i.e. Class I now a Class II or Class III due to reduction in primary or expansion area) which affects the potential for addition or remodeling to the home/structure served by the system; 2) the need to hire a consultant to find a suitable replacement area; 3) removal of the features if a suitable replacement area cannot be found; hopefully the feature(s) can be removed without further compromising the underlying soils; and/or 4) reduced potential for a Reduced Annual Fee Permit.

WHERE TO FIND THE INFORMATION

Information regarding the expansion/reserve areas on your property can be obtained from the septic plans for your property, particularly the 'as built' version of the plans if one exists. If you do not have the plans, please check our records here at the PRMD. You can request copies of plans from the Consultant of record or through our office.

DO THESE CONDITIONS FIT YOUR SYSTEM OR MONITORING HISTORY?

- Self monitoring reports not being submitted (2/year).
- Alarm box damaged or inoperative.
- Wells and/or valve boxes are damaged/missing/buried.
- Pretreatment unit turned off or damaged/inoperable.
- Monitor well registers high groundwater readings during the dry months.
- System is hydraulically overloaded or being

used in excess of peak design flow capacity (dose readings).

- Evidence of water intrusion during the winter.
- System has never been purged/balanced (per owner).
- Tanks never/rarely being pumped (per records).
- Failure appears imminent; malfunction is likely.
- Surfacing effluent (system failure).
- Erosion due to insufficient plant cover.
- Pre-treatment units requiring sampling for analysis, see #7 on Permit Conditions (previously known as Supplemental Agreement).

These are examples of some significant issues problems identified during our inspections and records review. If not addressed or corrected they can become more serious problems that can affect your system function and compliance with permit requirements. See Recommended Maintenance below.

RECOMMENDED MAINTENANCE:

- Clean sump filter annually.
- Pump tanks every 5 years depending on use.
- Purge and balance system annually/semi-annually by a C42 or experienced Engineering Contractor.
- Switch diversion valve (if you have one) annually, or as specified on septic plans.*
- Keep expansion areas unencumbered.
- Keep interceptor drain outfall clear (if present).
- Keep monitor wells and all valve boxes visible.

CONTRACTOR CORNER

Several septic contractors in Sonoma County provided the following feedback (i.e. comments, observations, ideas) regarding monitoring and maintenance of nonstandard systems:

- Many homeowners believe that completing the self monitoring form is all that's required to comply. They don't realize the importance of routine maintenance in preventing costly repairs.
- Often times the contractor is hired only after the system is functioning marginally or in failure.
- Pump the tank and clean the effluent filter per County guidelines.
- Install risers on older tanks.
- Large animals can impact the system area.
- Finding the system components can be difficult with overgrown vegetation and lack of records; it's important that the owner know what they have.
- Reserve areas are being compromised.
- Interceptor drains are not being maintained.

SYSTEM MAINTENANCE CONTRACTORS:

We have a preliminary list of contractors that perform monitoring/maintenance on nonstandard systems. For the list, contact Carrie Muller at (707) 565-2658

INFORMATION RESOURCES:

For septic system/self monitoring questions contact:

Wiles Edison, REHS Monitoring Program Coordinator
(707) 565-1691

Gabe Benyak, REHS Monitoring Program Specialist
(707) 565-2308

For billing questions, address, name or ownership changes, or Bulletin requests contact: **Carrie Muller**, Monitoring Program Administrator (707) 565-2658