

*Septic System Permit Applications, Subdivisions, and Site Reviews  
Within the Unincorporated Area of West Petaluma Affected by Nitrate  
Contamination*

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Procedure is to provide an interim set of guideline to be observed until the overall problem of nitrate contamination can be studied and new regulations adopted. This policy supersedes Sonoma County Department of Health Administrative Order 89-5.

**GENERAL**

Ordinance No. 2607 was adopted as an urgency ordinance to address the problem of contamination of the West Petaluma aquifer with nitrate. A major thrust of the ordinance was to require wet-weather groundwater determinations on all lots. Since the time of adoption of that ordinance, research on nitrate problems has shown that nitrate contamination from septic systems is a function of density of housing, volume of discharge, and depth of disposal trenches. Shallow systems and mounds appear to reduce nitrate problems created by sewage disposal. These systems were untested (innovative) when the ordinance was adopted.

**AUTHORITY**

Sonoma County Ordinances: No. 2607, 3019

**PROCEDURE**

1. All lots shall comply with Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department Regulation Number 9-2-17 (Site Evaluation and Perc Test Methods) pertaining to wet-weather percolation testing and wet-weather groundwater determinations.
2. In applying Regulation Number 9-2-17 to leach field areas with greater than 5% slope, staff shall carefully evaluate profile holes to determine that there is a confining layer below the proposed septic system into which an interceptor drain may be bedded. This confining layer must be demonstrated to be of sufficient uniformity to provide for effective dewatering of the leach field area.

If there is any question as to the potential effectiveness of an interceptor drain in a particular parcel, it shall be resolved by installation of the drain and observation of groundwater monitoring wells under wet-weather conditions.

3. An interceptor drain shall be provided on all lots that have not had wet-weather groundwater determinations. Drains shall discharge to approved locations and shall meet required

setbacks.

4. Lack of a confining layer in which to bed an interceptor drain will result in the need for wet-weather groundwater determinations.
5. Areas which exhibit spring activity or potential wintertime seepage areas shall be subject to wet-weather groundwater determinations.

All Well and Septic Section Registered Environmental Health Specialists shall observe the above interim standards when processing applications in the West Petaluma area as defined by Ordinance 2607 (see map boundaries). Additional profile holes may be required to substantiate the necessary soil conditions in the proposed leach field area. All such holes shall be personally observed by a Registered Environmental Health Specialist from the Well and Septic Section and shall be observed by the consulting Civil Engineer or Environmental Health Specialist and included in the report prepared for the project.

**Attachments:**

Map

**Approved by:**

Date posted 9/27/02

/s/ Richard L. Holmer

**Richard L. Holmer, Operations Manager**

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