



The On-Site Sewage System Operation & Maintenance (O&M) Program

What is operation & maintenance?

In order for your on-site septic system (OSS) to work properly, it must be cared for regularly. Think of an OSS as a personal wastewater treatment plant. Just as a city's wastewater treatment plant must be monitored and maintained, a homeowner with an OSS needs to properly operate, monitor and regularly maintain his or her OSS. This reduces the chance that you'll need to do major repairs to your system, which could cost tens of thousands of dollars.

What is an OSS evaluation?

An OSS evaluation is an inspection of all the components of your OSS: septic tank, pump tank (if applicable) and drainfield. A detailed checklist is completed, reporting the current operational status and any maintenance needs. For example, septic tanks are evaluated to make sure they are watertight and have functioning baffles in place. In addition, septic tank sludge and scum accumulation are measured to determine whether the tank needs to be pumped. Drainfields are evaluated for their hydraulic capacity and inspected to determine whether sewage is surfacing. An abbreviated checklist has been developed for homeowner reporting. If the Health Department does not have a permit record on file for the OSS, a site sketch must be submitted with the evaluation indicating the location of all OSS components on the property.

In addition to the checklist, a Report of System Status (ROSS) must be completed at the time of the evaluation and submitted to the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) with a \$35 filing fee.

When do you need an OSS evaluation?

- ◆ Once every three years for conventional gravity systems (systems consisting of a septic tank and gravity distribution drainfield ONLY).
- ◆ Annually for all other systems; unless more frequently as specified by the manufacturer.

- ◆ When a property is offered for sale, there must be a current ROSS on file and the evaluation must have been completed by a licensed O&M Specialist.

Who can perform an OSS evaluation?

- ◆ An OSS evaluation can be performed by a licensed O&M Specialist or;
- ◆ A homeowner may become certified to complete their own OSS evaluation except for the following circumstances:
 1. Proprietary OSS technologies;
 2. Community drainfields;
 3. OSS that were considered non-conforming when they were replaced;
 4. OSS serving food service establishments;
 5. Property transfer evaluations.
- ◆ To become certified, a homeowner must complete a homeowner training course provided by WCHD. For more information go to http://www.whatcomcounty.us/health/environmental/sewage_systems/certification.jsp

Who are the O&M Specialists?

O&M Specialists are individuals working for private businesses that are licensed by the Health Department who have:

- ◆ Passed an examination.
- ◆ Posted a bond with the Health Department.
- ◆ Maintained verifiable ongoing education or continuing education units.

A current list of Licensed O&M Specialists is available at the Health Department or at: http://whatcomcounty.us/health/environmental/sewage_systems/omspecialists.jsp

How much does it cost?

Because evaluations are performed by private businesses, the Health Department has no influence over the fees charged. We recommend that you obtain several quotes from Specialists on the list.

For more information, please contact the Whatcom County Health Department at: (360) 676-6724 or Health_EH_Parcel@whatcomcounty.us