

# Winter Weather Operations

## Test Pits & Site Examinations

*Any application that requires test pits or other site examinations may be delayed until spring, when snow melts and the ground thaws. Site evaluations, authorizations, and inspections are applications that are difficult to complete during winter conditions. As a result, winter weather conditions may increase turnaround time on these applications from weeks to months.*

Winter weather presents several problems for evaluating test pits, including poor light conditions, frozen soil, snow cover, and safety hazards. These conditions limit the level of accuracy and detail the Environmental Soils staff can achieve during site, system, and soil evaluations. Therefore, it is not possible to conduct a complete and proper site evaluation in winter weather conditions.

Deschutes County Environmental Soils Division will continue to accept applications for Site Evaluations and Authorization Notices, but these will not to be completed until the snow melts and/or the ground thaws. **Do not dig the test pits in advance** if applying for a Site Evaluation during the winter.

Even if your test pits are evaluated during the winter (see the exceptions below), it is possible a decision cannot be made immediately. Springtime water table monitoring may be required or it may be necessary to visit the site when favorable weather conditions exist and all features are clearly visible.

### Exceptions:

During winter conditions Environmental Soils staff will consider evaluating test pits under the following conditions and on a case by case basis:

- Major repairs are still a priority during winter due to the emergency nature of most repairs. It is important to provide the installer's name and phone number on the repair application so staff can coordinate test pit excavation and pit evaluation directly with the installer.
- Environmental Soils staff may agree to evaluate your test pits based on existing knowledge of the immediate area and its limitations. In order to determine if your site is eligible for winter test pit evaluation complete the following requirements:
  1. Submit a clear, complete, and accurate Site Evaluation application for winter evaluation approval. Carefully read application materials and use County handouts as resources. Incomplete and/or inaccurate applications will not be processed and may delay the project.
  2. Provide the installer's name and phone number on the application so staff can coordinate test pit excavation directly with the installer. Any test pits dug prior to the start of winter conditions will need to be re-excavated or new test pits dug.



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# Onsite System Installation

*Onsite system installations during winter conditions require special attention because of the potential for freezing of system components and the soil. No system installation should begin during winter conditions without approval from the Environmental Soils Division.*

## All systems:

Do not backfill system components or, especially, the drainfield with frozen clumps of soil. If it is essential to install an onsite wastewater system during winter months but the drainfield cannot be completed, it may be an option to install the septic tank only and use it as a temporary holding tank until spring. This requires a watertight test (see below) and a contract with a licensed DEQ pumper. Contact the Environmental Health Division to inquire about the possibility of using this approach.

## Sand filter systems:

Bottomless sand filters should not be installed when the ground is frozen. It is possible that lined sand filters or Alternative Treatment Technologies (ATTs) may be installed during winter weather conditions; however, contact Environmental Soils staff for approval before beginning work.

## Capping fill systems:

OAR 340-71-265 (2)(B) states: *Construction of capping fills must occur between June 1 and October 1 unless otherwise allowed by the Agent. The upper 18 inches of natural soil must not be saturated or have a moisture content that causes loss of soil structure and porosity when worked.*

Deschutes County allows installation of capping fills from April 1 until November 1. Occasionally during the winter months it is dry enough to mix the cap; however, the weather can change so quickly that it is hard to predict these dry periods. Regardless of current weather conditions, capping fills should not be placed when the ground is frozen, snow covered or wet. Call the Environmental Soils Division to discuss possible options if weather conditions appear to be favorable for capping fill installation between November 1 and April 1.

# Watertight Tank Test

Watertight tank tests are required on all new tank installations regardless of weather conditions [OAR 340-073-0025(3)]. During the test there may be no more than a one gallon leakage over a 24 hour period. (Exception: watertight test is not required for tank replacements when the system is in use)

**Normal Weather:** Tanks must be filled to at least two inches above the riser connection to the top of the tank.

**Freezing Weather:** Certain precautions are required to protect the integrity of the tank. **Tanks should be filled just to the top of the tee to avoid damage from freezing.**