



Operation and Maintenance Requirements Onsite Wastewater (Septic) Program

Why operation and maintenance (O&M) of septic systems matters

Septic systems protect people, pets, and the environment by safely treating and disposing of wastewater. If they are not cared for sewage can back up into your home or surface in your yard and pollute drinking water, rivers, and lakes. Plus, not taking care of your septic system can result in thousands of dollars in repairs.

Some systems need special care

If you own one of the following systems, you must also hire a certified maintenance provider to inspect and maintain your system at least annually and keep a contract with them for routine and unexpected service calls:

- Alternative Treatment Technology (ATT) systems
- Pressurized distribution systems permitted after Jan. 1, 2014
- Residential sand filters permitted after Jan. 1, 2014
- Commercial sand filters permitted after March 1, 2005
- Recirculating Gravel Filter (RGFs) systems

Why did the O&M rules change?

The new rules emphasize owners are responsible for making sure their septic system is safe and working properly by keeping a service contract with a certified provider, while providers handle system operation, maintenance, and reporting. Changes also reduce paperwork, letting maintenance providers focus on servicing systems and regulators focus on compliance instead of tracking.

What's new for service contracts

Service contracts are agreements between property owners and certified maintenance providers that help ensure timely maintenance and proper operation of septic systems. Consult a legal expert for guidance.

- **No expiration dates.** Contracts must stay active until the septic system is decommissioned. They can be terminated any time but are not set to expire automatically.
- **Termination rules.** Contracts must include clear reasons for ending the agreement, like non-payment.
- **Effective date:** The contract must include an effective date, which is the date the system starts operating or when a new agreement is signed for an existing system.
- **Service details.** Minimum service details are required and can be included as an addendum:
 - For ATT systems: include the recommended service in the manufacturer's approved maintenance manual
 - For pressure distribution and sand filters: use the DEQ checklist
 - For RGFs: follow the designer's manual
- **Written notifications.** If a problem cannot be fixed during inspection, the provider must notify the owner and the local agent in writing within 30 days and include an estimated correction date.
- **Cost is out.** Costs are no longer required to be in the contract under rule, but cost addendums can be updated without needing to submit a copy to the local agent.

Translation or other formats

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800-452-4011 | TTY: 711 | deqinfo@deq.oregon.gov

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What's new for property owners

Your main job: Keep a service contract with a DEQ-certified maintenance provider for the entire life of your septic system and follow their recommendations for use.

- **No more annual reports or fees for owners.** These are now solely the provider's responsibility.
- **Allow access to your system.** You must ensure the system is inspected at least annually by your maintenance provider. If the maintenance provider has reached out about access to your property, be sure to coordinate with them.
- **Report system failures.** You must report system failures to both your provider and your local onsite agent. If your system is failing you must follow the agent's instructions to fix it, which may include getting a repair permit.
- **30-day grace period:** If you sell or buy a property, or your contract is terminated, you or the new owner have 30 days to get under contract.
 - **Penalties.** If you don't have an active contract, in addition to civil penalties you may face extra inspection costs and a compliance recovery fee.

What's new for maintenance providers

As the expert, the maintenance provider is responsible for inspecting, maintaining, operating, and reporting on the system.

- **Annual reports and fees.** You are solely responsible for submitting these. This includes if you gave timely termination notice but already completed an inspection that year; if you did not notify the owner and local agent of contract termination within 30 days, whether or not you performed an annual inspection; or if you are still under contract at the end of the reporting year and no inspection was completed. **Exceptions:**
 - Systems put into operation July-December do not require reports/fees until the following year.
 - If you take on a new client in November or December but can't access the system due to weather or denied entry, you do not need to submit a report/fee for that year, but you must notify the local agent.
- **Written reports.** Observe and record conditions in the treatment unit and/or absorption area during all O&M activities and report observations to the system owner in writing.
- **Maintenance.** Ensure minor or major maintenance is completed, as needed. Permits or a sewage disposal service licensed professional may be required.
- **Written notifications.** If a contract ends, notify both the owner and county in writing within 30 days.
- **Recordkeeping.** Only required for 3 years (instead of indefinitely).
- **Late fees.** A compliance recovery fee will apply to each late report and fee.
- **Adhere to the conditions of your contract.** It will now be a violation of rule, and you could face enforcement penalties and fines.
- **Start-up inspections.** Regulators can require start-up inspections and reports for pressure distribution, sand filter, RGFs and ATT systems before issuing a Certificate of Satisfactory Completion.

Contacts

Please visit our [contacts page](#) to find links and names for local entities and the appropriate regional DEQ staff.

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