



# FACT SHEET

Office of Water Resources- Onsite Program

## Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Application for Repair

### When is an Application for Repair Required?

A residential Onsite Wastewater Treatment System, or OWTS, Application for Repair is required when a septic system, or any component of a septic system, has failed. Ten criteria for failure are defined in Rule 7 of the OWTS Rules. An Application for Repair may also be submitted if the homeowner desires to upgrade or modernize their septic system, for example replacing a cesspool. The Department may also allow an Application for Repair to be submitted if a fire or other catastrophic occurrence necessitates the replacement of the structure served by the OWTS. No increases in wastewater flow or changes in use for the structure are allowed.

There are five specific scenarios when an application will not be required prior to conducting repairs on an OWTS. In all cases the work must still comply with the OWTS Rules and all but #1 do not require notification to the Department once work is completed:

1. A septic tank may be replaced when a crushed tank or other failure necessitates a repair to maintain the wastewater handling capacity for the structure. An Application for Repair must still be submitted by the end of the next business day.
2. A crushed building sewer may be replaced.
3. Installation of risers to facilitate tank access.
4. Retrofitting an effluent screen on the outlet of a septic tank.
5. Emergency in-kind replacement of mechanical or electrical components of an OWTS.

### The DEM Application for Repair

Applications for Repair of an OWTS must be prepared by a DEM-licensed Class I, II or III OWTS designer. The distinctions of these classes of OWTS licenses are described in Rule 9 of the OWTS Rules and in the OWTS Fact Sheet "Septic System Designer License Classes Explained." An Application for Repair does not require submission to DEM of a soil evaluation unless DEM specifies otherwise.

### Locating and Contracting With Licensed OWTS Professionals

DEM maintains a list of Licensed Designers and installers; Soil Evaluators are listed as Class IV designers. These lists are available on the DEM website: [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov). Hard copies are available at the Water Resources Permitting Office at 235 Promenade Street, or by calling 222-4700. You may also search to find designers who may be active in your neighborhood by using DEM's Online Permit Search tool.

It is prudent to approach the process of selecting OWTS professionals as you would any other major purchase. Seek price quotes from more than one of each contractor required (installer, designer, Soil Evaluator). Be certain that proposals or contracts are based on the same scope of work (system type, components and landscaping or property restoration the contractor will provide, etc.). If your site is difficult or may require an advanced treatment system, inquire as to whether the contractors have experience with this type of system. Contracts should articulate installation procedure, costs and payment schedule. Designers are required to witness and inspect installation of systems they design, so you should know if inspection services are included in the proposal or contract or will be part of a separate contract with the designer. Beware that situations may occur, or conditions may be encountered which will require cost adjustments. For example, if bedrock is encountered during the soil evaluation or during installation, ledge test holes must be excavated and costs will increase. It

is important that the designer incorporate into the contract situations which may cause an increase in costs to occur. Request references and contact the parties provided by the contractors.

## Permitting

### **Application for Repair** (Submitted by Licensed Designer)

**Purpose:** This form is used to obtain DEM's approval of a design for a repair to a septic system and includes information about the site, the owner, and the use of the property. It is accompanied by plans of the proposed OWTS repair showing system specifications and a site plan. The site plan must depict the location of the system and home on the site, current and proposed grading and the location of roads and sensitive receptors such as drinking water supplies and waterbodies, etc. The application must include soil information from any previous OWTS applications for the site, applications for adjacent lots, or the designer's knowledge of the area.

**DEM Action:** The Department will review the water table data and soils information provided with the application and if needed will schedule soil testing with the Licensed Designer. Once sufficient soils data is acquired, the Department will:

- Approve the application** if it is complete, in compliance with the rules, and there are no deficiencies or errors on the plan.
- Return the application to the designer, unacceptable**, if the application is incomplete, is not in compliance with the rules, or there are errors or deficiencies on the plan.

A repair of an OWTS is required to meet the requirements of the OWTS Rules to the greatest extent possible. If necessary, certain requirements may be relaxed at DEM's discretion, provided that the repair is consistent with the protection of public health and the environment. In reviewing any request for relaxation of the Rules, the protection of the public health and the environment shall be given priority over all other considerations. Requests for variances are not required for Applications for Repair.

### Using the Internet to Monitor Application Activity

OWTS application activity may be monitored from your computer using "OWTS Permit Search", a service available through DEM's website.

### Approved Application

Your approved application will indicate any special terms of approval on the lower right side of the form. When stamped "Approved" and signed by DEM, your application becomes your "permit to install." Once the OWTS design is approved by DEM, a copy of the approved permit is mailed to the owner, the designer, and the city/town Building Official. The permit expires in accordance with the terms specified in the permit itself, but not more than one year from approval. If an application follows the property owner's receipt of a Notice of Violation, the permit will expire according to the terms set in the Notice.

### System Installation

Following approval of the OWTS application, installation may begin. Your designer must call DEM to notify the Onsite program of the "Start of Construction" within 24 hours of beginning the installation. If DEM has indicated required inspections in the permit, the designer will be required to contact DEM to arrange for the required inspection(s). The components of the system will be delivered to the site and your installer will excavate the soil to accommodate the components of the system. Beware that during excavation, conditions may be encountered that were not anticipated or uncovered during the permit application process. Should such a situation occur, the job will be halted and additional testing or additional design work may be required before the installation can resume. Once construction of the system is complete, your designer must certify to DEM that the system was installed in accordance with the design and meets DEM OWTS Rules.

### **Certificate of Conformance**

Once your system is installed and DEM receives the certification from your designer that the installation is proper, the application process is complete! DEM will issue a Certificate of Conformance, providing a copy to the city/town Building Official, and the system may then be used.

### **Operation and Maintenance**

Operation and maintenance needs differ based on whether a system is a conventional system (septic tank, distribution box and leachfield) or an innovative or alternative (A/E) system (components vary by type of system). However there are some fundamental operation and maintenance considerations common to all system types. Avoid excessive water use by distributing routine activities requiring a lot of water evenly over the week (laundry, running dishwasher) and quickly repairing leaky faucets and toilets. Septic systems function, in part, due to the contribution of bacteria; heavy use of bleach or strong cleaning materials, as well as dumping any paint, organic solvents or other chemical preparations down a sink or toilet, can interfere with the proper functioning of your system. If depleted, the bacterial population will ordinarily restore itself naturally over time provided use of the chemical agent is discontinued.

DEM requires that owners with certain alternative or experimental systems have a maintenance contract with a qualified service provider. DEM's requirements are specified in the system's certification. Your system's designer is required to provide you with detailed operating instructions for your A/E system.

It is wise to have your system inspected regularly, and pumped as needed. One can determine whether the tank needs pumping by measuring the thickness of solids on the bottom of the septic tank and scum on the surface of the wastewater in the septic tank. Systems should be inspected no less frequently than once every five years. Some communities have wastewater management ordinances that may have specific maintenance requirements. Contact your town to obtain current information concerning any such requirements.

### **Additional Information on Operation and Maintenance**

Information on operation and maintenance of your septic system is available in the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Onsite Wastewater Training Center's information sheet "*Maintaining Your Septic System*" (available online at: [www.uri.edu/ce/wq/OWT/Factsheets/index.htm](http://www.uri.edu/ce/wq/OWT/Factsheets/index.htm)). Detailed information on maintaining a septic system is also available in the DEM publication "Septic System Checkup: The Rhode Handbook for Inspection" (available online at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/pubs/regs/regs/water/isdsbook.pdf>).