

O&M : (Operation and Maintenance) FAQs : (Frequently Asked Questions)



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Why is an O&M program required?

On Jan. 1, 2015 a new statewide sewage rule (OAC 3701-29) went into effect. This O&M program is required by the state sewage rules (OAC 3701-29-09 and OAC 3701-29-19). The intent of the program is to reduce pollution by periodic evaluations of sewage treatment systems (STS).

Why do we need the O&M program?

O&M is vital to the continued use and functionality of STS including gray water recycling systems. O&M generally means an evaluation of an existing STS to ensure that it is properly functioning to alleviate conditions that may pose a risk of pollution to your own or your neighbor's water and property. In addition, maintenance helps prolong the life of a STS, much like regularly changing the oil in your car extends the life of the vehicle.

Will the Health District inspect my property?

It is the Health District's hopes that all homeowner's will contract with registered sewage service providers to inspect their own system, or will register as a sewage service provider to conduct the review of their own STS. If a property owner does not contract with a registered service provider the Health District is required to assure an evaluation is completed.

What will I have to pay for this program?

There is currently no charge for the O&M permit. If you are currently having your system serviced by a registered sewage service provider, your provider will need to submit the report to the Health District. This report sent to the Health District is nothing new, as the registered sewage service providers have submitted these reports for a number of years. If the Health District must perform the evaluation (because one completed by a registered service was not submitted) a fee will be charged.

Will I have to replace my sewage system?

Probably not. Only systems that are malfunctioning will need corrective actions. This will likely mean making repairs such as replacing a pump or motor, or alterations to the existing systems such as adding an additional leach line or putting in a new tank in place of a collapsed tank. It is very rare that an entire sewage system will need to be replaced.

Why do some sewage systems have a one-year permit and others have a five-year permit?

Largely, the one-year permit is required by State rules. Systems such as drip distribution, low pressure piping and discharging systems are specified to require yearly maintenance per their state approval for use. As these systems all have mechanical components, the Health District combined them under the term “mechanical systems.” Mechanical systems are seen to be a higher risk as they have motors, pumps and other working components that could fail at any time. If any of these components do fail, the sewage system will not be treating the sewage adequately thus allowing sewage to pollute our wells and waterways. The five-year permit was chosen for the traditional septic tank followed by a leach field system. With no motors or mechanical components these systems naturally have lower potential to fail. Traditional knowledge is to pump a septic tank every 3-5 years. This information was the starting point. To further decide how often this permit should last information from the US Census Bureau and the Ohio State University was utilized. Based on US Census data, the average home size in the Midwest is a three-bedroom home and the average household includes three persons. Data by the Ohio State University suggest a three bedroom home with three occupants would need pumped approximately every 5.9 years. Based on all of this information, the five-year permit was chosen.

How was the phase in process decided?

The phase in process was a collaborative effort. Invitations to join the O&M stakeholder group were sent to elected officials, realtors, homeowners, commercial sewage system operators, sewage installers, sewage designers, sewage service providers, sewage pumpers and was attended by Health District staff and members of the Board of Health. In addition, the meetings were advertised to the public and open to anyone who wished to attend. The group discussed the requirements of the Ohio Administrative Code 3701-29 and moved forward in developing the phase-in process.

Phase 1 includes those items that the Ohio rule requires to be phased into the program. **Phases 2** through **Phase 4** were intended to slowly begin phasing in existing sewage systems as part of routine activities. **Phase 5** and **6** are the last phases as they will be larger sweeping activities. **Phase 5** includes discharging systems and occurs before non-discharging systems as they pose a larger risk to public health. **Phase 5** and **6** will start in the southern areas of the Health District. Starting in the southern area was chosen as they are of higher population and the proximity to the O’Shaughnessy, Hoover and Alum Creek reservoirs — all of which are drinking water supplies.

Where can I find more information?

The Health District maintains a dedicated O&M webpage at DelawareHealth.org where information including educational material, the official phase-in plan and the current phase can be found. If you have additional questions, please call 740-368-1700.