

ACT 537 - SEWAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS - PART II

Ensuring Long-Term Use of Onlot Systems Through Proper Operation and Maintenance

This Part II fact sheet continues the overview and discussion of minimum requirements, benefits and steps for establishing a successful sewage management program that was begun in Part I.

How can my municipality begin managing onlot systems?

The first step in the process is for your municipality to assess available administrative, technical, financial and management options by preparing an update revision to its Act 537 official plan. The update revision should provide for identification of all onlot systems and a determination of their operational status. Such factors as the suitability of soils, underlying geology and any peculiar environmental conditions that could impact the continued long-term use of onlot systems are also examined.

Using this information, the various options to ensure performance of routine operation and maintenance for new and existing onlot systems are identified and compared.

Ultimately, the specific options and alternatives for a sewage management program that best fits with your municipality's resources and needs are selected for implementation. In connection with the management program, the plan should also evaluate required needs for septage handling (septage haulers, septage disposal options, etc.) and develop appropriate administrative and legal procedures.

Finally, to allow implementation, your official plan must establish an ordinance that legally authorizes the municipality's program to manage onlot systems.

What other steps are there to developing a Sewage Management Program?

There are several additional steps that should occur together with sewage facilities planning in considering and developing the service options, administrative alternatives, legal procedures, ordinances and other pieces that will make up your municipality's sewage management program. These steps primarily involve gaining understanding and consensus from the residents in your municipality who will be impacted by the proposed management program.

It is important that opportunities be afforded for homeowners and the public to learn what onlot systems are, how they work and why management and maintenance of these systems is so important. Public education meetings, civic events or programs provided at local schools can be excellent ways to get the word out.

The citizens in your municipality will better accept the management program if they have a voice in its planning and development. Surveys or questionnaires, public forums for exchanging questions and opinions, as well as citizen representation on advisory or planning groups can all be very helpful.

Residents need to be informed about the details of the proposed program, how it will affect them and what actions they need to take. Mailings, newsletters, articles or announcements in the local media, websites and public information sessions are just some of the ways Pennsylvania municipalities have educated and involved their citizens.

Can municipalities work together through Sewage Management Programs?

Yes. Municipalities in many parts of the state have banded together to form "joint local agencies." These agencies then implement sewage management programs consistently throughout the service areas of their member municipalities.

Can sewage management be administered through existing municipal structures?

Yes. Some municipal governments are already involved in the permitting of onlot sewage systems through programs administered by agencies such as joint sewage committees, county health departments, etc. These existing onlot permitting programs involve testing proposed sites, reviewing designs and addressing adequate system construction through final inspections of installed onlot systems. Unfortunately, in many cases, system installation marks the boundary of the permitting program.

Sewage management programs, administered by joint local agencies, or even municipal sewer authorities, can extend municipal oversight for these permitted systems to include regular operation, maintenance, testing and/or

inspection. Such actions assure that the special care and attention taken to properly design and install onlot systems is not negated by the lack of system management and oversight.

Is management of onlot treatment systems cost-effective?

Yes. Maintaining properly installed sewage systems can extend the life of these systems and may save the homeowner the cost of repairing or replacing an abused, malfunctioning onlot system. Sewage management programs can also help prevent future problems from occurring with systems that have been repaired following malfunction.

Municipalities confronting areas with numerous malfunctioning systems often opt to extend sewer lines for great distances. This action may solve the problem, but can be very costly to the municipality and the affected property owners. Sewer lines can inadvertently promote unwanted development. Municipalities might also attempt to deal with areas of malfunctioning individual onlot systems by connecting the affected homes to a single immediate problem; however, there is still the potential for future malfunctioning of the resulting community systems unless the municipality has a management program that commits it to oversee proper operation and maintenance of these larger systems.

Is financial and technical assistance available for my municipality to develop or update its sewage facilities official plan?

Yes. Municipalities can apply to DEP for a planning grant to reimburse up to 50 percent of the cost of preparing a sewage facilities official plan.

Additionally, to assist municipalities in the development of their sewage management programs, DEP has several model ordinances that reflect the requirements typical of the different programs. The “pump” model ordinance reflects the simplest approach to a sewage management program, while the ordinance for a municipal inspection program is the most complex approach. You should keep your municipality’s management program as simple and effective as possible to meet your special needs.

Is there financial assistance available to my municipality to establish and administer a Sewage Management Program?

Yes. Sewage management program costs of staffing and administration are eligible costs of the sewage enforcement reimbursement program. Your management program is expected to charge reasonable fees to cover the costs of the activities you conduct. If revenue does not adequately cover all these costs, your municipality may recover monies from the state to eliminate this deficit amount, up to 50 percent of the total cost of the enforcement program. Local agencies qualifying for 85 percent sewage permitting enforcement reimbursement also qualify for the same method of calculating reimbursement for their sewage management program’s activities.

For more information, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us, keyword: Sewage or contact the DEP regional office in your area.

Southeast Region

2 E. Main St.
Norristown, PA 19401
Main Telephone: 484-250-5900
24-Hour Emergency: 484-250-5900

Counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia

Northwest Region

230 Chestnut St.
Meadville, PA 16335-3481
Main Telephone: 814-332-6945
24-Hour Emergency: 1-800-373-3398

Counties: Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren

Southwest Region

400 Waterfront Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-4745
Main Telephone: 412-442-4000
24-Hour Emergency: 412-442-4000

Counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington and Westmoreland

Northeast Region

2 Public Square
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711-0790
Main Telephone: 570-826-2511
24-Hour Emergency: 570-826-2511

Counties: Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming

Southcentral Region

909 Elmerton Ave.
Harrisburg, PA 17110
Main Telephone: 717-705-4700
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Counties: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry and York

Northcentral Region

208 W. Third St., Suite 101
Williamsport, PA 17701
Main Telephone: 570-327-3636
24-Hour Emergency: 570-327-3636

Counties: Bradford, Cameron, Clearfield, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga and Union