



Onsite Wastewater Treatment System FAQ for Single Family, Multi-Family, and Commercial Structures

General Questions:

1. Q: What is an onsite wastewater treatment system (OWTS)?

A: An OWTS is comprised of a treatment tank and a soil absorption system. According to the California Plumbing Code 713.1 "when a public sewer is not available, a building may be connected to a private sewage disposal system."

2. Q: How do I know if I am on OWTS or sewer?

A: Properties that have sewer service typically receive a sewer bill. Local sewerage entities are most often a water provider or city agency. However, there are several sewerage entities in San Bernardino County owned and/or operated by Special Districts or Community Service Districts. They are likely to know the location of their service area in relation to your lot, as well as connection information.

3. Q: What type of OWTS are reviewed by San Bernardino County?

A: Environmental Health Services (EHS) reviews conventional septic, Advanced Treatment Units (ATU), leachlines, seepage pit dispersal systems, and alternative dispersal systems (e.g. mounds, sand filters, drip irrigation and hybrid leachlines).

4. Q: What is the Local Agency Management Program (LAMP)?

A: The LAMP was created to protect public health and safety in unincorporated areas of San Bernardino County by providing minimum standards and requirements for the treatment and disposal of sewage using OWTS, when no connection to a sewer is available. The LAMP was approved on July 13, 2017 and went into effect on May 13, 2018.

5. Q: Why are different types of OWTS used?

A: The type of OWTS used is determined by numerous factors including location of system, cost, geographical data, water course, slopes and lot size.

6. Q: Where is my OWTS?

A: EHS does not know where your OWTS is located. Please contact a local plumber to locate your system.

7. Q: Will San Bernardino County review new or replacement systems in incorporated cities?

A: No, each city is responsible to respond to the requirements of Assembly Bill (AB) 885. EHS will no longer review new or replacement systems after May 13, 2018.

8. Q: Who do I call if I am having problems with my OWTS?

A: Contact a plumber regarding OWTS problems, and a factory qualified service provider for ATU's.

9. Q: How do I get approval for a new OWTS?

A: You must:

- Submit three copies of a soil percolation report (one copy must have an original signature), engineering details, and a to-scale plot plan to EHS for review and approval.
- Obtain a permit through the San Bernardino County Building and Safety division.

10. Q: Is there a review fee?

A: Yes, fees are based on project type. Please see the current [fee schedule](#) on the EHS website.

11. Q: What is a perc rate?

A: A perc rate is a design rate that determines how much absorption area is required for the OWTS. The design rate is determined by the percolation test and soils characteristics.

12. Q: How do I know if my lot has had a perc rate determined?

A: Complete an [Application For Percolation Review](#) with all the information requested and submit it to EHS for review. The current [fee schedule](#) for a Percolation Design Rate Review is located on the EHS website. A percolation test will be required if a perc rate is not on file.

13. Q: When is a percolation test needed?

A: Percolation tests are required for all new construction, whenever existing data will not allow EHS to set a design rate for the replacement of existing systems, and when challenging factors are present such as steep slope, shallow depth to groundwater, and nearby streams.

14. Q: Who does a percolation test?

A: Only the following professionals are permitted to perform a soil percolation test: Certified Engineering Geologists, Geotechnical Engineers, Registered Civil Engineers, Registered Environmental Health Specialists, and Registered Geologists.

15. Q: What are the minimum setbacks required for an OWTS?

A: Per the LAMP, page 25 (table 3.1):

Minimum Setback Required From	Septic Tank	Disposal Field	Seepage Pit
Non-public water supply well	100	100	150
Public water supply well	100	150	200
Buildings or structures	5	8	8
Property line adjoining private property	5	5	8
Streams and other flowing bodies of water	100	100	150
Drainage course	50	50	50
Lakes, ponds, and other surface water bodies	200	200	200
Colorado River/Mojave River	50	200	200
Large trees	10	-	10
Seepage pits	5	5	12
Disposal field	5	4	5
Private domestic water lines (building service line)	5	5	5
Public domestic water lines	25	25	25
Distribution box	N/A	5	5
Ground surface on sloping ground	N/A	15	15
Groundwater	5	5	10

16. Q: How much distance is required between multiple leachlines or multiple seepage pits?

A: For:

- **Leachlines** increase the minimum separation of 4 ft. between lines for each foot below the minimum 12” by 2 feet, so a trench with 2 ft. gravel below drain line, 6 ft. separation is required. For conventional leachlines with 3 feet of gravel, 8 ft. separation is required. Please refer to California Plumbing Code (CPC) H 601.9 Construction for additional information.
- **Seepage pits**, a minimum of 12 ft. from edge to edge is required, in addition to a properly constructed distribution box.

17. Q: What is EHS looking for on a plot plan?

A: A plot plan is included with the percolation report and must show the property lines, a footprint of the home/project along with any ancillary structures, the dimensions of the OWTS along with the location, and the 100% replacement area. The report will describe the number of bedrooms/ fixture units and discuss the source of the domestic water supply. Any wells must be noted, both on the lot in question and for neighboring lots. Contours and scale must be included, and all setbacks must be met and shown. See question 15 under General Questions for the list of setbacks.

18. Q: Who draws the plot plans?

A: Certified Engineering Geologists, Geo-technical Engineers, Registered Civil Engineers, Registered Environmental Health Specialists, and Registered Geologists draw plot plans.

Single Family Residence Questions:

A single family residence is one or two residences on a single parcel of land.

1. Q: How close do I have to be to a sewer to be required to connect?

A: 200 feet for a single-family residence plus 100 feet for an additional single-family residence.

2. Q: What are the guidelines for determining the number of bedrooms?

A: Use the following guidelines:

- After the living room, dining room, family room, kitchen, bathrooms, and utility rooms have been established all other habitable rooms totaling at least 70 square feet will be considered a bedroom. This includes but is not limited to: dens, libraries, studies, weight rooms, game rooms, sewing rooms, workshops, and lofts.
- Rooms that open to a living room, dining room, family room, kitchen, or entry way and have a single unobstructed opening (no doors) with a minimum 50% opening of the total wall space (minimum 6' wide) with archways or other acceptable means shall not be considered bedrooms.
- Rooms that can only be accessed through another bedroom are to be considered part of that bedroom, such as a master suite and are not counted as an additional bedroom.
- Plans may be reviewed on a case by case basis by the department, when it is not clear as to whether or not a room is a bedroom.
- Any cases, which will require the relocation or modification of doorways, are to be reviewed and approved by Building and Safety to address any structural consideration such as load bearing walls. This is to be done prior to approval or sign-off by the department.

3. Q: How do I know what size OWTS I need?

A: For residential projects, it depends on how many bedrooms will be in the home (see below table H 201.1(1) from the CPC).

Number of Bedrooms	Gallons of Effluent Per Day	Gallons of Septic Tank Capacity
1-2	500	750
3	670	1,000
4	800	1,200
5-6	1,000	1,500

4. Q: What is the minimum lot size required for an OWTS?

A: All new lots are required to be a minimum of 1/2 acre. One single family residence may be developed on an existing lot with an approved percolation report. Existing lots not meeting the 1/2 acre requirement created prior to September 7, 1989 in the Santa Ana Regional Water Board (RWB) jurisdiction, and not within a prohibition area, may have a single family residence. Lots created in the High Desert prior to April 24, 1987 may also have a single family residence.

5. Q: Can EHS certify my OWTS?

A: No. EHS does not certify private OWTS and is not involved in property transfers.

6. Q: How do I get my OWTS certified?

A: There are two forms located on the website available for use.

- Conventional septic systems use the [Private Sewage Disposal System Certification form](#).
- Advanced Treatment Units use the [OWTS Certification](#) form.

Have a professional as listed at the top of the form certify your system.

7. Q: I want to put a mobile home in the back of my house. Can I connect it to my existing OWTS?A:

Yes, if the original system was properly sized (following CPC Table H 201.1 (1) Multiple dwelling units), the disposal area is increased by 30% and the lot meets the minimum lot size requirement of one acre.

8. Q: I am remodeling my house by adding a bedroom or more. How does this affect my OWTS?

A: If the original system has been oversized in anticipation of future additions and can be certified by a qualified contractor, then no change is required. If only the minimum system was installed, then it will have to be replaced with the appropriate size tank, and the dispersal area must be increased. This may require more land than is available and a lot may not be developed in excess of what can be treated and disposed. In addition, the 100 % replacement area requirement must be met.

9. Q: I have a ½ acre lot and want to add an accessory dwelling unit in the back of my property. What do I need to do to get EHS approval?

A: If you cannot meet the minimum lot size requirements, then you may request an exemption be approved from the RWB ½ acre requirement per dwelling unit. Provide EHS with an engineered perc report, details of the ATU (if an exemption is denied), plot plan showing the existing and proposed systems, plus 100 % replacement areas. Also pay appropriate fees for review.

Multi-Family Residence/Commercial) Questions:

1. Q: How close do I have to be to a sewer to be required to connect?

A: For:

- Multi-family development (three or more dwelling units) and residential subdivisions, 200 feet for the first lot, plus 100 feet for each additional lot/residence.
- Commercial projects, 200 ft. for the first 300 gallons per day plus 100 feet for each additional 300 gallons design flow. When using drainage fixture units, 200 feet for the first 20 fixture units, plus 100 feet for the next 20 fixture units and so on.

2. Q: How do I know what size OWTS I need?

A: The OWTS size is based upon the project and will comply with CPC table H 201.1 (1) and table H 201.1(2),422.1 and the California Building Code 1004.1.2.

3. Q: What is the minimum lot size required for an OWTS?

A: Commercial projects:

- In the Santa Ana RWB jurisdiction (and not in a prohibition area), may have a maximum of 20 fixture units per 1/2 acre and not exceed 300 gallons daily waste flow per 1/2 acre.
- In the Lahontan RWB jurisdiction (High Desert) may have a maximum of 250 gallons of daily wastewater flow per 1/2 acre.
- The remaining areas are limited to 300 gallons per day per 1/2 acre, or 20 fixture units per 1/2 acre (if not located in a prohibition area).

4. Q: How do I get my OWTS certified?

A: Use the OWTS Certification form located on the website and have a professional (as listed at the top of the form) certify your system.

5. Q: I am subdividing 5 acres into five 1-acre lots, but there is a building on the parcel now. Do I have to request a percolation rate for that lot too?

A: No, but you must have the current OWTS for the existing building certified. A subdivision of land in which a proposed building will utilize a septic system does require a soils percolation report. Remember, no matter how many buildings you have on one lot, you must comply with the RWB daily discharge requirements (see question 3 above).

6. Q: “I want to expand my movie theater that seats 100 people to seat 500 people instead. I am not adding any fixture units and I have a 1200 gallon septic tank. Can I use the same tank?”

A: Per the CPC, additional fixtures would be required and per the code, the estimated daily flow for a theater is 5 gallons per seat. For 500 people the daily flow is 2500 gallons. The 1200 gallon tank would not accommodate the addition of seats. The septic tank size is determined by $(.75) \text{ flow rate} + 1125$, so a 3000-gallon tank would be needed.