

# Mendocino County Division of Environmental Health

## Policy 4222.01

### **SEPTIC SYSTEM REPAIR DESIGN POLICY**

#### **Intent and Benefit**

It is the Division's intent to limit the confusion regarding what constitutes an acceptable repair by specifying minimum soil depth criteria for repairs. One benefit of allowing for a lesser standard is that applicants would come forward more readily knowing that they will not be held to the stricter standards required of new construction. A second benefit is that the cost of the repair would be held to a minimum thus making it more likely to be executed without the need for enforcement action.

#### **Background**

The Division's authority to promulgate policy with regard to repairs is contained in the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's Onsite Waste Treatment Systems Policy, specifically the Mendocino County Local Area Management Plan.

The Division has been guided by an August 1995 Repair Policy (Form # 42.43) which addressed 1) when to consider initiating a repair, 2) how to size the repair, 3) generally what soil conditions would be acceptable.

#### **Statement of Problem**

The Division did not include minimum repair standards in the previous policy rather only guidelines indicating an attempt should be made to meet the Basin Plan Policy criteria. Without specific numerical standards for critical design criteria, there has been much confusion, ambiguity and uneasiness regarding what should be considered acceptable repair design criteria. This confusion has led to inconsistencies among staff within the Division and more importantly has led to contention between the staff and the private site evaluators over what is deemed acceptable repair design criteria.

#### **Implementation**

A failure analysis shall be performed to document the problem and establish the probable cause of the failure. If the cause is a collapsed or disconnected pipe the applicant is advised of the cause and that no repair permit is required. If the septic tank is determined to be the cause of the problem, advise the applicant to obtain a permit for the septic tank replacement. The abandonment of a functioning field in order to expand a structures footprint shall not constitute a repair.

When it is determined that the leach field is in failure, a site evaluation investigation shall be conducted to identify a replacement primary leachfield area of acceptable soil conditions. A site investigation might rely on a backhoe test trench or three hand augers in combination with previous personal experience in the immediate area.

The Mendocino County LAMP critical criteria, depth to groundwater or impervious layer below the infiltrative surface, may be reduced from the minimum of 24 inches on a case by case basis.

If a replacement area was already specified in a Site Evaluation Report for the property, then the EHS or QSE should conduct a site visit to verify soil conditions as reported and determine that the site has not changed significantly to preclude the use of the designated area. The location and or design of the replacement area may have to be modified based on the EHS's or QSE's findings. A 100% future replacement field shall be identified utilizing either test pits or three hand augers. This future replacement leach filed design shall utilize standard design criteria. In cases where the site is constrained the existing field in failure may become the future replacement area.

Leachfield sizing shall be based on 0.50 gals per sq ft. per day (utilizing sidewall and trench bottom area) for sites that pre-date the inception of the Basin Plan Policy. For properties with Site Evaluation Reports completed after the inception of the Basin Plan Policy, either the sizing specified in the Report or, alternately, the most current Basin Plan sizing criteria may be used.

Upon the adoption of the Russian River TMDL additional site criteria may be required at sites identified by the NCRWQCB to be near an impaired water body. Such requirements shall be set forth in the Tier 3 Advanced Protection Management Program for Impaired Areas of the Mendocino County LAMP.

**Effective Date: 5/2017**

**Revised Date: 1/2016**

**Notes: Supersedes Policy # 42.43 dated: 6/02**

**Director's Initials: \_\_\_\_\_**