



## **Environmental Health**

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**SITE EVALUATION AND PERMIT PROCESS  
FOR ON-SITE SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS**  
*Modified to support Mendocino County  
Planning & Building Services Amnesty Program  
November 1, 2023 – November 1, 2024*

**1. SEPTIC SYSTEMS INSTALLED WITHOUT PERMITS**

Systems installed without county review and permits violate Section 16.08 of the Mendocino County Code. In order to facilitate the legal recognition of unpermitted systems, all penalties will be waived during the amnesty period. You will need to hire a qualified site evaluator to conduct soil testing and evaluate the design of the unpermitted system to see if it conforms to current regulations. It is possible the unpermitted system may need to be upgraded, expanded or replaced.

**2. TESTING IS REQUIRED FOR A SEPTIC PERMIT**

All parcels must be tested for suitability for installation of an on-site septic system. Commonly called the "perc" test, these soil tests serve as the basis for the system design of the which is required before a septic permit can be issued.

**3. QUALIFIED PERSONS MUST DO THE TESTING**

You will need to hire a qualified site evaluator to perform the testing on your property and to prepare the septic system design. These persons are Registered Environmental Health Specialists, Civil Engineers, or Certified Professional Soil Scientists. A list of local qualified site evaluators is available at the local office of Environmental Health. Those persons with acceptable certification who do not appear on our current list must be approved by the Environmental Health Division in advance and must notify us of the date of the tests.

**4. THE SITE EVALUATION PROCEDURE**

There are two primary methods of testing your soil for permeability: laboratory texture analysis and the soil percolation test in the field. The site evaluator may choose to do both procedures, if necessary. Regardless of the testing method, soil inspection pits and detailed descriptions of the soil strata are required. These form the basic data for issuance of a on-site sewage system permit. **Note: Certain tests can only be performed between January and April (wet weather testing). Therefore, it is critical that you contact a qualified site evaluator to begin testing as soon as possible.**

For existing unpermitted septic systems, the qualified site evaluator will also need to determine the size (length, width and depth) of the current leach lines as well as the size and condition of the septic tank. When sufficient facts have been gathered, the evaluator will prepare a Site Evaluation Report (septic system design) based on soil conditions, expected wastewater flow, setbacks and other site constraints. Although an existing system may already meet the state's minimum requirements, some may need to be expanded. Systems that cannot meet state minimum requirements must be abandoned and replaced.

**5. APPLYING FOR YOUR PERMIT**

The Site Evaluation Report must be submitted to the Environmental Health Division in order to obtain a permit. The site evaluator must submit two (2) signed and stamped copies of the site evaluation report **with the current review fee** as established by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors. The report must include all tests conducted, including failed soil tests, and their location. One area, or two separate areas, large enough for the initial and reserve absorption fields must be acceptable for an on-site sewage system permit in order for a permit to be issued. The report should include a current telephone number and address for the applicant.

The review time by the Environmental Health Division is approximately 5-10 working days. You will be notified by telephone or letter to let you know when the soil report is acceptable. You may apply for a permit in person or by mail. Permit fees will be accepted only for approved Site Evaluations Reports. Please check with the Environmental Health Division for the current permit fee amount as established by the County Board of Supervisors.

**6. SITE INSPECTION OF PROPERTY**

An Environmental Health Specialist **may** need to make a site inspection of your property prior to issuing your septic system permit. A Vicinity Map with adequate accurate mileage and directions for locating the property must be provided in the Site Evaluation Report.

**7. ADDITIONAL DWELLING UNITS AND OTHER ACCESSORY STRUCTURES**

Additional Dwelling Units of any type require approval of the Environmental Health Division. Additional Dwelling Units may require that a separate septic system be installed. Please contact Environmental Health for specific information on requirements for approval of such units.

**8. NON-STANDARD SEWAGE SYSTEMS**

Non-standard systems are used on sites which may not meet the standard criteria of the site evaluation process. Non-standard Systems have specific advantages which can overcome some site constraints. Installation must be according to the designer's plan and the Non-Standard System Program. On-going monitoring, an Operational Permit and a Recorded Notice on the property deed are required of all Non-Standard Systems. Copies of the program are available at the Environmental Health offices.



**Public Health Department  
of Mendocino County**  
*Healthy People, Healthy Communities*



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**Septic System Requirements for 2023 - 2024 Amnesty Program:**  
**Instructions for Site Evaluators**

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

- Goal is to bring properties into compliance through cooperation rather than enforcement.
- Penalties are waived, but system must comply with all other state and county requirements.
- A Qualified Site Evaluator (Evaluator) must describe existing septic system and submit design package.

**1. Discovery of Existing System.**

Determine what has been installed

- Septic tank: size and construction material
- Distribution: location of d-box, equal or serial distribution
- Leach lines: number, length, material, width and depth of trenches

**2. Soils**

Normal soils description adjacent to existing primary field, another for replacement.

- Minimum of 3 hand augers or one test pit per field
- Hydrometer and/or perc testing
- Description of soil profiles

**3. Design Package**

County will evaluate design package in accordance with normal criteria.

- Evaluator must submit two copies of a design package that meets requirements of County Form #42.04 ([www.co.mendocino.ca.us/hhsa/chs/eh/landuse.htm](http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/hhsa/chs/eh/landuse.htm))
- Normal review fees must be submitted with design package
- Must document Basin Plan compliance
- Effluent filter and inspection risers required; tank lid risers recommended
- If existing system does not meet appropriate sizing criteria, prepare design for necessary expansion
- If cannot meet Basin Plan, design must address demolition of existing system and construction of new system

#### **4. Inspections**

Site Evaluator will assume primary responsibility for most inspections. Photographic documentation with signed statement of acceptability from evaluator will be acceptable.

- Verify that existing system is not in failure - inspect for surfacing.
- Verify that lines are on contour
- Check septic tank inlet/outlet for tightness
- If new lines or other changes are required, DEH will inspect new construction unless owner hires designer to perform inspection.

#### **5. Deadlines**

Septic design or building permit application must be **submitted** by November 1, 2024.