

On-lot Sewer System Management Ordinance Frequently asked Questions

1. What is On-lot Management?

About 280 homes in East Pennsboro Township rely on on-lot wastewater systems, commonly called septic systems, for the proper treatment and disposal of household wastewater. An on-lot wastewater system usually consists of a buried tank to capture solids and grease and a buried drain field for disposal of the remaining liquid. Although an on-lot system is a very simple and inexpensive way to treat wastewater, it must be maintained to be long-lasting and trouble free. East Pennsboro Township Commissioners have enacted a program to ensure that all property owners follow a few simple procedures to keep their on-lot systems properly maintained. On-lot management is a Township-wide program that establishes a schedule for the periodic removal of accumulated solids from septic tanks and inspection of the on-lot systems.

2. Why is an Ordinance Needed?

Most of us do not really think about on-lot systems, which are usually out of sight and out of mind. Sometimes, it is only after problems arise; such as sewage backups, contaminated wells, or problems in selling a home; that we give serious thought to on-lot systems. The majority of the homes in East Pennsboro Township with on-lot systems also have on-lot wells for drinking water. Failure to properly maintain an on-lot system can lead to premature failure of the system, contamination of area drinking water wells, and transmission of waterborne diseases. It is the Commissioner's desire to ensure that the Township's groundwater resources are kept clean and safe for drinking water supply.

Costs for repair of failing on-lot systems or extension of public sewers to rural area are very expensive options that may be avoidable with proper system maintenance. Construction costs for a replacement on-lot system, assuming adequate soils and space is available, can be \$10,000 or more. Construction costs for extension of public sewers to rural areas are even higher on a per household basis. The on-lot management ordinance requires that all owners of on-lot systems maintain their systems. Annual costs for regular system maintenance will generally be less than \$75.

3. Why is East Pennsboro Township enacting an On-Lot Management Ordinance Now?

In November 2006, the Township adopted an update to its Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan. This plan is required by the State of Pennsylvania to insure that the Township is providing adequate sewage treatment facilities and protecting the public health by preventing the discharge of untreated or inadequately treated sewage. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental

Protection (DEP) requires that the Act 537 Plan address both public sewage facilities and private on-lot systems. DEP required that East Pennsboro Township's Plan include on-lot system management as a key component of the Township's overall approach to properly handling sewage.

4. Do other municipalities in Cumberland County have on-lot management programs?

Yes, several municipalities in Cumberland County have adopted on-lot management and many more are considering programs as they perform sewage facilities planning. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) encourages each municipality with on-lot systems to enact on-lot management. DEP provides annual subsidies to reimburse municipalities for 50% of the municipalities' cost to administer the program.

5. What are the homeowners' responsibilities under the program?

All on-lot system owners must have their septic tanks pumped out and inspected at least once every four years. The Township will be divided into four geographic sections for the purpose of administering the program. All on-lot system owners in a given section will receive notices from the Township at the beginning of the year directing them to have their systems pumped during the calendar year. Homeowners must contract with a licensed pumper of their choice to have the system pumped and inspected during the calendar year the notice is received. A list of licensed pumpers can be obtained by contacting the Township or the Cumberland County Solid Waste Authority. The notice will include a form (East Pennsboro Township Septic System Report) to be completed by the pumper regarding the condition of the tank and disposal of the septage. It will be the responsibility of the homeowner to provide the completed form to the Township.

6. How much will this program cost?

The cost for the periodic pumping and inspection should be similar to what you currently pay to have your system pumped. There are about 8 private firms that are licensed by Cumberland County to provide septic pumping services in the County. You may want to obtain price quotes from several firms before selecting one that is right for you. The Township's cost to administer the program is expected to be small, about \$25 per Septic system once every four years. The overall cost for pumping and program administration is very small when compared to the cost for public sewer service or on-lot system repairs. This administration cost will be assessed by the Township to all on-lot septic system users instead of spreading the cost over the entire Township since property owners on the public sanitary sewer system already pay a quarterly sewer fee for the administration, operation and maintenance of the public sewer system.

7. *What if I just had my On-lot system pumped?*

Property owners having their on-lot systems pumped out within one year of receiving the initial notice from the Township do not have to have their system re-pumped. However, the homeowner will need to provide to the Township a copy of the Cumberland County Pumping Certification as proof of the pumping.

8. *What if I want to have my system pumped more frequently than every 4 years?*

You are free to have your system pumped out more frequently than every four years. However, the ordinance requires that the Township's Septic System Report be *fully* completed and signed by the pumper each time a septic tank is emptied. A copy of the completed Septic System Report should be submitted to the Township so it has a record of the pumping.

9. *What if I believe that pumping every 4 years is too frequent for my system?*

The on-lot management ordinance provides for pumping intervals greater than every 4 years when the on-lot system owner can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Township that the system can operate efficiently with less frequent pumping. In no case shall the period extend beyond 8 years. Such a request for extension of the pumping frequency can only be made after the initial pumping and inspection. Requests must be made in writing to the Township with all supporting documentation attached. The Township will determine if an exemption can be granted to the 4 year pumping frequency based on such factors as tank size, historical pumping frequency, maintenance reports, and other factors the Township may considered pertinent. The Township may require an on-lot inspection for the purpose of evaluating requests for less frequent pumping. The applicant will bear the cost for any such inspection.

10. *What will the Township do with the information provided on the report form?*

The pumper completing the septic tank system inspection must record his findings on the East Pennsboro Township Septic System Report form. The pumper shall fully complete the form to address all requested information. The property owner is then responsible for providing a copy of the completed inspection report to the Township within thirty days of the inspection. The Township will then enter the information contained on the inspection form into its on-lot management database. This information will be used to:

- A. Confirm the system has been pumped out and inspected;
- B. Confirm the system is operating properly; and
- C. Provide adequate information to the Township to plan for potential public sewer extension to areas of need.

11. What if a problem is found by the pumper during the inspection?

If the report form indicates a problem with the system, the Township will forward the form to the Township Sewage Enforcement Officer (SEO) to investigate. The SEO will contact the homeowner to arrange for a time to investigate the problem. The Township SEO is a fully trained professional who will work with the property owner to resolve the problem. Sometimes the solutions involve simple, inexpensive steps that do not require modification to the on-lot system. However, in other cases the solution may require system modification or replacement. The Township SEO will consider all feasible alternatives before issuing a repair notice.

12. What will happen if I do not comply with the ordinance?

The Township Commissioners hope all Township citizens will fully comply with the provisions of the ordinance. The ordinance has been developed to protect public health, the water resources of the Township, and the citizens' investment in their on-lot systems. All on-lot system owners must comply with the ordinance in order for these goals to be reached. Any person that fails to comply with any provision of the ordinance shall, upon conviction by the District Justice, be subject to a fine of not less than \$100 nor more than \$1,000 plus costs or imprisonment. This penalty provision is similar to the penalty provisions of other Township ordinances.

13. Where else can I get information about on-lot septic systems?

There are several web sites that deal directly with sewage, on-lot systems, and on-lot management. These include the National Environmental Services Center, choose Wastewater/Septic Systems; the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, choose Quick Access: DEP Programs, on-lot disposal systems; and the Pennsylvania Septage Management Association.

14. What else should I be doing to maintain my on-lot system?

The most important action to properly maintain an on-lot system is to have the system pumped out on a regular basis. However, what is put into the system can also impact its operation. Only sewage and normal domestic wastes should be discharged into the system. Industrial wastes, automobile oil and other domestic oil, excessive fats and grease, toxic and hazardous substances must not be placed down the drain. You should also consider either composting or disposing of food preparation wastes in the trash instead of relying on a garbage disposal unit, which

greatly increases the loading to an on-lot system. Clean surface or ground water, including spring water, water from roof or cellar drains, and water from basement sump pumps must also be kept out of the system. The distribution field should be maintained with a grass cover and heavy equipment or automobiles should never be driven over the distribution field.