

Louisiana Department of Health & Hospitals
Office of Public Health
Center for Environmental Health Services
Onsite Wastewater Program

Information Packet for Applicants

(For Septic Tanks with Secondary Treatment)

FOREWORD

In order to expedite the issuance of a permit to have an individual wastewater treatment plant installed, it is necessary for you to read and understand the information contained within this application packet and to submit all of the requested information complete with signatures where indicated.

The information contained in this packet is a step by step guide to assist you through the process of acquiring a permit to have an individual sewage system installed all the way through to the finalization of your permit by representatives of the Office of Public Health. If you have any questions regarding the information contained in this packet please contact your local Environmental/Sanitarian Services Office at:

<https://ldh.la.gov/page/3745>

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I. Terms and Definitions

AEROBIC TREATMENT UNIT – a sewage treatment system that utilizes bacteria which require oxygen to break down the waste materials; bacterial treatment is obtained using a mechanical means to introduce the needed oxygen into the system.

EFFLUENT - the typically treated liquid that drains from an onsite wastewater treatment system into a designated drainage right of way, parish maintained servitude for discharge or natural drainage, or water body.

FIELD BED/LINES or ABSORPTION TRENCHES – a secondary treatment method for septic tank effluent consisting of a system of level bottomed trenches with gravel, or gravelless piping, designed to absorb and further treat partially treated effluent through infiltration into soil. The effluent is further treated through biological processes that occur as the effluent is slowly absorbed into the soil.

OXIDATION POND – a specially designed and constructed pond which serves as secondary treatment for a septic tank. The oxidation pond accepts the partially treated effluent from a septic tank and through the biological interactions of bacteria, air, and sunlight, with proper retention time, complete digestion of harmful substances in the wastewater occurs.

PERCOLATION TEST – a test conducted to determine the absorptive capability of the pores in soil and permeable rock to determine if a soil can support secondary treatment of the partially treated effluent from a septic tank. This test is conducted if a septic tank with field lines is chosen as the method for sewage treatment.

PERPETUAL MAINTENANCE – the term as related to an individual onsite wastewater treatment system means that the system requires routine maintenance forever, or until such time that it must be replaced with a new system.

POTABLE WATER – water that is suitable for drinking.

SAND FILTER BED – a specially constructed bed of sand and gravel designed to accept partially treated effluent from a septic tank. Further treatment occurs through biological processes as the effluent filters through the sand. Oxygen is required for the microorganisms growing on the surface of the sand particles; therefore, it is important that the bed only be covered by a layer of washed, coarse gravel.

SEPTIC TANK – a sewage pre-treatment system that utilizes bacteria which require an atmosphere without oxygen to break down waste materials. Septic tanks must be followed by a form of secondary treatment to further treat the partially treated wastewater exiting it..

STATE IDENTIFICATION TAG – a 6 by 6 inch plastic tag with the Louisiana State Seal and a specific number which allows for identification of all sewage treatment systems installed. This tag is supplied by the manufacturer or their representative for every system manufactured and sold for installation in the State of Louisiana. After installation of your treatment system, the bottom portion of the tag is placed somewhere on the system so the installer can initial it each time they do a service/warranty inspection. The top portion of the tag must be turned in to the Office of Public Health along with the Certification by Installer form after complete installation of the system.

II. Types of Individual Sewage Treatment Systems

Please note that there are several different types and brands of individual sewage treatment systems that are approved for installation and use in Louisiana. Once you have made a decision as to what type/brand of system will work best for you and your needs, it is important to learn your responsibilities for that system. Please take the time to read over the available literature supplied in this packet and learn the importance of maintaining your treatment system as it relates to a healthier environment in addition to the health of you, your family and neighbors; additionally, proper and timely maintenance will add to the overall life of your treatment system and prevent costly repairs.

If your property is large enough with an appropriate ground water depth and the soil will pass a percolation test, then you must utilize a septic tank with field lines (**Note:** there can be no effluent discharge with this type of system). Please be advised that certain areas in the State of Louisiana will not pass a percolation test and your local Sanitarian may be able to assess whether your particular piece of property may or may not pass the test based on prior geological surveys and soil maps of the area. The other instances where a septic tank can be used are in conjunction with an oxidation pond or with a sand filter bed when field lines cannot be utilized (**Note:** the size of sand that is acceptable for a sand filter bed is no longer easily available in Louisiana). The latter two secondary treatment methods require there be a discharge of treated effluent to an appropriate receiving area. **Please understand that a septic tank alone is not an acceptable treatment system; it must be followed by secondary treatment to ensure that wastewater is sufficiently treated to render it acceptable for release to the environment.**

It is very important that you familiarize yourself with whatever type of onsite wastewater treatment system you choose to have installed. As with all things, routine maintenance is a must with any type of treatment system and recommendations should be followed. Routine maintenance will prevent premature failure of your system and save money in the long run.

PLEASE NOTE: Failure to maintain your system can result in fines being assessed up to \$100.00/day per violation to a maximum of \$10,000.00/year if the Office of Public Health receives a complaint regarding a system that is not properly working.

It is equally important to be familiar with your local parish rules and regulations regarding individual sewage treatment systems. Some parishes do not allow any off lot discharges which may restrict you, based on lot size, soil characteristics, and ground water depth, to the use of a particular type of system.

III. Hiring a Licensed Installer and Choosing a System

If you do not know any licensed installers, the health unit has a list that you are welcome to look over. However, we cannot recommend any particular installer just as we cannot recommend a particular brand of treatment system. **Remember, whoever you choose to install your system must be a licensed installer.** All licensed installers are issued a license by the State of Louisiana's Onsite Wastewater Program. **(Note: A licensed plumber is not the same as a licensed onsite wastewater system installer).** If the installer does not have their license with them, please feel free to call your local health unit or Sanitarian who can verify this information. For a list of licensed installers you can visit our website at: <https://ldh.la.gov/page/4686/>. Another, excellent, way to find a good installer is to ask family members, neighbors, and friends, who have an individual onsite wastewater treatment system, for a referral.

We encourage you to research the different types and brands of treatment systems and make sure that whatever system (septic tank or mechanical treatment unit) you choose has been approved for use and installation by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospital's Sanitarian Services Engineer. You want to ensure that the licensed installer you hire is endorsed by the manufacturer for the particular brand of system you choose if it is a mechanical treatment system. This information is also available from your local health unit or Sanitarian. Please remember, like most things, the cheapest system may not necessarily be the best choice, so it is a good thing to learn as much as possible about the different types of systems available in Louisiana.

IV. Steps in the Application Process

A. Step One – Documents Needed

The first thing that must be determined before a permit can be issued is whether a community sewer system is available to service your home, business, or other applicable structure. If a community system is available, you must use it for your sewage disposal needs. If there is no community sewage, then the property/homeowner should follow these instructions below:

The property/homeowner must be the individual who applies for the permit. If the property/homeowner is not able, due to an illness, etc. then a designated agent form must be filled out and notarized to give a designated individual permission to act on their behalf (you can get the designated agent form from your local Sanitarian at the parish health unit or from the program website at: <https://ldh.la.gov/page/wastewater>). You must obtain an official legible copy of your property plat. The plat must have the State Surveyors Seal or it must be designated as a “true copy” by the Clerk of Court’s office. You will also need proof of ownership of the property, i.e. Deed, Bill of Sale, Act of Donation, etc. that has the legal description of the property within the document. You also need to have a 911 address assigned to your property. Bring these items in addition to the other requested information within this packet to apply for your temporary permit. Please note that your property must meet minimum lot size and frontage requirements in order to install an individual sewage treatment system (see **FORM-A**). Remember to also check local parish ordinances since they may have further restrictions.

B. Step Two – Detailed Plans

You must submit a detailed plan/drawing of all structures (houses, buildings, driveways, pool, barns, etc.) and their proposed use and location on the property. **(Please see attached examples of what your plans should look like)**. Identify on the plan where all potable water lines are or will be located. If there is a private water well, it must be clearly shown on the plans along with the piping to any structures on the property **(Please note that you want to keep your sewage treatment system and all its component parts as far away from your potable water sources as possible; however, there are minimum distance requirements that must be followed)**. You can speak with your local Sanitarian as to specific minimum distance requirements, or they can be obtained from our website above. For private water wells, your system and its components must be a minimum of 50 feet away.

You must show where the sewage treatment system will be installed in relation to all potable water sources. A description of distances of the sewage treatment system from all potable water sources, property boundaries, and structures must be included. A complete description of the effluent outfall pattern (where the system discharges if you are installing a sand filter bed or oxidation pond) should be included and shown on the plan **(Please note that your system cannot discharge across privately owned property without benefit of a legal right of way before reaching a publicly maintained or natural waterway)**.

All parts of your sewage treatment system must be clearly labeled on your plans. It is recommended that you speak with a licensed installer who may be able to assist you with your plans. The licensed installer should be able to tell whether you will need additional and/or specific components for your treatment system based upon the landscape of your property. Your plans can be hand drawn as long as they are legible and include all necessary information. **Please note on your plans anything such as trees, professional landscaping, etc. that may limit the installation of any part of your system.**

Please include directions to your property (FORM-B) and make sure an address is posted in a visible area for the Sanitarian who will conduct a site survey of your property.

C. Step Three – Important Information to Know

Read each of the following forms (**FORMS SF-10A & SF-11**), carefully before you sign and date them. If you do not understand any part of a form, do not hesitate to contact your local Sanitarian for clarification. **A permit cannot be issued until all the forms are signed and returned to the local health unit office.**

Please read through the educational information included within this packet as well. This is also a requirement for issuance of your permit. Most people give little thought to the process of sewage disposal, however, with the ever-increasing population growth and development, especially in unincorporated areas that have no community-type sewage services, the need and use of individual treatment systems is also ever-increasing. Unfortunately, many people do not take the time to educate themselves on the impact of improperly treated sewage and how it affects public health directly or indirectly through effects on the surrounding environment. Once you have obtained the necessary documents, sketched out your site plan, and have read and signed the included documentation, you can now return to the health unit office to begin the process for obtaining your permit.

D. Step Four – Return to Health Unit

A Sanitarian or other Office of Public Health representative will make copies of your documentation (**property plat, proof of ownership, plans**) and return your originals. They will input your information into a database and print a temporary permit with all pertinent information. You will not receive the temporary at this time. A Sanitarian must do a site visit first (**see step five**). You will be instructed as to when your temporary permit can be picked up. The property owner is the only individual to whom the temporary permit will be released.

E. Step Five - Sanitarian Site Survey

Before you can obtain your permit, a Sanitarian must visit your property to determine if the plans you submit are feasible for your property and verify your point of discharge. While it is not a requirement for you to be there, it is highly recommended. We encourage you to be involved in the entire process from start to finish. Taking the initiative to learn all about your individual sewage system can save you time and money in the future.

If your property is gated and locked, you must make arrangements to have it accessible to the Sanitarian.

If you have animals, please ensure they are confined. Most Sanitarians will not conduct the site survey if there are loose animals (dogs, horses, cattle, etc.) on the property.

The boundaries of your property should be clearly marked so the Sanitarian can determine where your property ends on all sides.

After the Sanitarian determines your plans and specifications fit the landscape of your property, and the discharge point, if necessary, is acceptable, he or she will sign the temporary permit for release and you will be able to pick it up at the health unit on the next business day.

If the Sanitarian determines that something needs to be changed, you will be notified. The change needed must be reflected on the plans and on the temporary permit before it can be released. This is another reason we encourage you to be present at the site survey.

Note: If you plan to be present at the time of the site survey, arrangements can be made to bring your copy of the temporary permit. This can save you an extra trip to the health unit; however, you must let the person, inputting your information in the database, know that you intend to be present at the site survey and would like your copy at the time of the site visit. Again, please understand that the Sanitarian will only release the temporary permit if he/she finds everything is satisfactory.

REMINDER: PLEASE POST AN ADDRESS IF NOT ALREADY POSTED

F. Step Six – Installation of your System

If you obtained your temporary permit prior to construction of your home, please note that your temporary permit is good for one year. If for any reason you have not installed your system within a year, you can contact the local Sanitarian Services Office for an extension.

Your installer needs to see your permit and plans before he/she installs your system. We recommend you give him/her a copy and keep your original copy. In no case should the installer begin the installation without first having looked at the temporary permit with its specifications, and the plans. The installation of your system needs to be conducted as specified in the details of the plans you submitted to the Sanitarian/Environmental Services Office for approval in accordance with State rules and regulations. Any deviation from the original plan must be approved by the Office of Public Health. **If an unforeseen problem occurs, and the installation cannot be done according to the original plans, contact your local Sanitarian before you proceed.** If you do not contact your Sanitarian, the Office of Public Health is not obligated to issue a final approval on your system, and your permit can and may be revoked.

We highly recommend you be present at the time of installation so you can ask the installer any questions you may have; also, to ensure that the installer is following the State rules and regulations governing the installation.

The Office of Public Health cannot approve your site for utilities until the **final verification of installation is conducted by a Sanitarian with the installer present and the State Identification tag** is turned in to the local health unit office.

PLEASE NOTE: A Sanitarian must complete a final verification on the installation of your septic tank with secondary treatment; therefore, it is very important to notify the Sanitarian Services Office 24 hours prior to the expected completion of the installation. No part of the system can be covered until the Sanitarian has verified the installation has been conducted according to State rules and regulations.

Once the final verification is conducted and found to be satisfactory and the state tag is received, your permit will be finalized by verification, and utilities will be released. A copy will be mailed to you, or you can make arrangements with the local office to pick it up if needed sooner.

V. Appendix – Forms & Plans Examples

You will need to carefully read over the forms requiring your signature (SF-10ST & SF-11ST), and bring them back to the health unit to apply for your temporary permit. This is to ensure you understand your obligations with respect to the perpetual maintenance of your treatment system; this cannot be stressed enough, it is extremely important. Form B should also be filled out and returned along with the other forms, so that the Sanitarian doing your site visit will be able to find your property. Form A is for informational purposes only.

The plans examples included in this packet indicate the items that should be shown when you do the drawing of your plans. It is not necessary that you have your plans drawn by a professional; however, if you do them yourself, they must be clearly labeled with all necessary information shown, and they must be legible.