

CORNWALL BOROUGH QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT the SEWAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Following are some frequently asked questions and answers about the Borough's sewage management program.

What are the requirements of the sewage management program?

The Borough's ordinance, establishing a sewage management program, requires property owners with onlot sewage disposal systems to have their treatment tank(s) (ie. septic or aerobic tank) pumped and inspected every three years by a registered pumper/hauler. The pumper/hauler must submit the Sewage Management Report form after each pumping and inspection along with the administrative fee to the Borough.

Why is the municipality implementing a sewage management program?

By adopting a sewage management program, the municipality is ensuring that onlot systems are operating properly and that the public's health is protected. Because onlot systems discharge contaminants that may cause disease, it is important that such systems work properly to prevent these contaminants from reaching the surface of the ground and/or the groundwater, where the public's health is at risk. Treatment tanks serve to settle solids and trap scum to prevent clogging of the absorption area (drain field). That's why these accumulated solids and scum must be pumped out regularly to ensure proper operation of the system.

An inspection of the system helps to ensure that the system is operating properly and that no malfunction is evident. Onlot systems that are malfunctioning may require more frequent pumping, cleaning and unclogging of lines, and replacement of system components.

Why should I comply with this requirement?

First of all, it is the law. The Borough has enacted an ordinance establishing the sewage management program, and penalties are provided for those who do not comply.

However, there are numerous benefits associated with a sewage management program. These include the following:

- Maintains or improves the performance of onlot systems.
- Extends the useful life of a system and generally can help to reduce the costs associated with repairs and/or replacements.
- Helps to prevent system malfunctions. Malfunctioning onlot systems can affect public health and may lead to the need for costly community sewage collection and treatment systems (which may inadvertently promote unwanted development).
- Can help to maintain existing property values and ease of property transfers.
- Provides a less costly manner of sewage disposal (pumping tanks every three years) compared to monthly sewer bills if the home or building were connected instead to a public community sewage collection and treatment system.
- Helps to prevent community-wide problems, such as health concerns or reduced property values because of malfunctioning onlot sewage systems.

What happens if I recently had my tank pumped?

To maintain accurate records of compliance with the required three-year schedule, the Borough will only recognize pumping and inspection in compliance with the ordinance if it is done in the year assigned. Treatment tank pumping performed in years other than the required year does not exempt the resident from pumping and filing a report in the year required by the municipality. Therefore, property owners should make plans to pump and inspect their onlot systems in the year assigned unless necessary for the proper functioning of the system.

However, we recognize that some property owners may have had their systems built, repaired, pumped, or inspected within the last year. If you fall in one of these categories, contact the Borough to provide proof of this activity and to ensure your system is on track with requirements for the next pumping/inspection cycle. You will be given an exemption for this pumping/inspection cycle if you can show proof (receipt from pumper/hauler or completed report form) that your onlot system has been pumped/inspected within the last year. This exemption will only be provided for the first cycle and in limited cases in cycles after that, so be prepared to follow the Borough's schedule thereafter.

What if . . .

my onlot sewage system is only used part-time during the year?

Although, in general, the three-year pumping and inspection requirements must be met, the Borough will consider valid requests with justification from property owners for a reduction in pumping frequency. We offer an alternative to pumping which is having a qualified inspector (someone from the pumper/hauler list) come out to evaluate the depth of solids and scum in the treatment tank(s). If the total depth of solids and scum is less than 1/3 the total capacity of the tank you would qualify for an exemption from the current pumping cycle. We recommend having your tanks pumped if you are close to 1/3 capacity and have a small size tank. You must complete an Exemption Application; send it along with the form for evaluating the solids and scum in treatment tanks (which the pumper/haulers must fill out) and the administrative fee to our department. Likewise, we are also authorized to increase the pumping frequency of onlot system treatment tanks on properties for good cause, such as an undersized treatment tank, an above average solids buildup in the tank, use of a garbage disposal in the home or building, or a malfunctioning system.

I am the only person living at my house?

As explained above, the Borough will consider valid requests with justification from property owners for a reduction in pumping frequency. Again, you may qualify for an exemption by having a pumper/hauler evaluate the depth of solids and scum in the treatment tank (see above).

I have a holding tank, outhouse, or cesspool?

Any system within the Borough is required to be pumped and inspected.

What if . . .

I have vacant land with no buildings or onlot sewage systems?

Contact the Borough. You must complete an exemption form stating that no on-lot sewage systems or buildings are present on the property. We will ask permission to field check your property to verify the information provided. Our department will then remove your property from the database. In the future, when the property is developed, you will be re-entered into the database and will be required to comply with the ordinance and fall into the regular three year cycle of the Borough.

I have an abandoned house and onlot sewage system?

It is recommended that you properly abandon the onlot sewage system so you will not have to pump the treatment tank again the next cycle. Proper abandonment of an onlot system would include removal and proper disposal of sewage and solids from all components and then either completely remove the tank(s) or collapse the tank top and at least one side and fill any voids with inert, clean material to the surface of the ground. Please notify the Sewage Enforcement Officer so he/she may verify this activity.

I rent or lease the property?

The property owner (your landlord) is required to arrange for the pumping and inspection of the treatment tank(s) or face the enforcement consequences of the sewage management program ordinance.