



UNDERSTANDING ONLOT SEWAGE DISPOSAL AT RECREATIONAL CABINS, CAMPS AND CAMPSITES



SEWAGE ENFORCEMENT OFFICE
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What laws and/or regulations govern sewage disposal in Pennsylvania?

The Act was enacted on January 24, 1966 to address existing sewage disposal problems and to prevent future problems. To meet these objectives, the Act requires proper planning of all types of sewage facilities, permitting of onlot sewage systems (OSS), as well as uniform standards for designing OSS. OSS include sewage disposal systems that utilize soil absorption areas or drainfields, holding tanks, privies, composting toilets, incinerating toilets, and recycling toilets to treat, hold, and/or dispose of the sewage on the same lot that it is generated on.

DEP developed regulations to address the Act, effective May 15, 1972. Title 25, *Pa. Code*, Chapter 71 relates to the administration of the Act's sewage facilities planning process, Chapter 72 discusses the rules for OSS permitting and Chapter 73 addresses the technical standards for the design of OSS. All three chapters are available at The Pennsylvania Code website.

Who is responsible for administering the Act and DEP's regulations?

All municipalities must develop and implement a comprehensive official sewage facilities plan that addresses the present and future sewage disposal needs of its residents. DEP reviews and approves these official plans and any subsequent revisions.

Local municipalities, through their Sewage Enforcement Officer (SEO), manage the permitting program for OSS. The SEO is responsible for conducting soil profile testing, percolation testing, OSS design review, and approving or denying OSS permit applications. The SEO and the individual installing an OSS must follow the standards established in Chapter 73 of DEP's regulations. DEP's primary role in the OSS permitting process is to provide oversight to local agencies and SEOs.

Can cabins or campsites have indoor plumbing with running water and flush toilets?

Unless the lot is served by a properly permitted onlot system (drain field or sandmound), water is to be hand-carried in for minimal usage. Sanitary facilities consist of an outside privy. Any water hand-carried into the cabin must be disposed of so as not to create a nuisance or public health hazard. Several scenarios exist where certain existing cabins may have existing indoor plumbing. In these cases, the sewage must be

properly disposed of either through connection to a public sewerage system, a properly permitted OSS, or an otherwise grandfathered OSS. For example, an OSS installed prior to May 15, 1972 or a previously SEO-approved OSS is considered an existing means of sewage disposal and the indoor plumbing with water under pressure and the existing OSS will be allowed to remain, unmodified, until such time as a sewage malfunction is determined to exist.

If a cabin has a water supply that needs to be replaced, what should be done?

If an existing water supply source or water supply line into the cabin deteriorates, the Owner should request that the SEO inspect the campsite's sewage disposal facilities and provide proof that there is an existing, functioning OSS on the campsite. If the SEO inspects the OSS and finds a problem or malfunction, the Lessee must obtain a permit from the SEO to correct or replace the OSS.

If a cabin does not have indoor plumbing, can a water supply be connected to the inside of the cabin either from a stream, spring, or a drilled well? How should the sewage generated in this case be disposed of?

If a water supply line is not already connected to the inside of the cabin, water from a stream, spring, well, or other water supply source **may not** be piped into the cabin.

A well may, however, be drilled on the campsite as a water supply source. The well will not be approved for connection of piped water into the cabin. The owner must install an outdoor hand pump or frost-free hydrant at the source and hand-carry the water into the cabin.

If there was no water supply source previously connected to the inside of the cabin, there was no need for an OSS with a drainfield on the campsite previously. Indoor plumbing and flush toilets require a means of sewage disposal.

Can greywater or sink drainage from a cabin be piped and disposed of into a privy?

No. Greywater is considered sewage under Pennsylvania rules and regulations and must be disposed of properly according to those same rules and regulations. Privies are designed to dispose of sewage on lots that have no water under pressure and no piped wastewater from the cabin to the privy, now or in the future. Plumbing to move wastewater, even if just



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from sink discharges, from the cabin to the privy is illegal, and the SEO will require this piping to be disconnected from the privy and the wastewater to be properly disposed of.

Can wastewater from a cabin be disposed of into a holding tank?

It depends. If a cabin has a malfunctioning OSS, and the SEO is unable to find an acceptable replacement area, then a holding tank can be used to abate the malfunction. A holding tank may not be used in lieu of other methods of sewage disposal due to their need for regular service and maintenance to prevent their malfunction and overflow.

Under no circumstances can water be piped into a cabin and then request a holding tank permit from the SEO. The SEO cannot issue a permit for a holding tank under this circumstance

Can composting, incinerating, or recycling toilets be installed inside a cabin?

Yes, in most cases. These types of toilets are very different from normal household flushing toilets in that they are waterless vessels and require more operation and maintenance. They must be installed, operated and maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications. However, since they do not require a water supply or drainfield, they may be good candidates for owners who would like to install indoor toilets to their cabin. Contact the municipal SEO for specific requirements, approvals, and/or permits prior to the installation of these types of toilets.

If the cabin is to be rebuilt, can indoor plumbing be installed?

If the cabin is rebuilt on the same site as the old cabin and had a functioning OSS and/or a water supply with a water supply line into the cabin, these amenities may be installed in the new cabin. Several issues need to be evaluated in these cases. The owner will need to work closely with the SEO to establish what is required. When a camp is to be rebuilt and was previously served by an older pit privy, the privy will likely need to be upgraded to a sealed vault privy.

Generally speaking, what improvements to drinking water and sanitation can and can't be done to a cabin?

Sewage – Sewage disposal facilities constructed prior to May 15, 1972 and that have not been modified, are considered grandfathered. If the facilities are work-

ing, there is no need for improvement. If the facilities are malfunctioning, a repair or replacement system must be installed. Any changes done to an OSS must be permitted by the SEO prior to any work beginning.

As the need to replace a pit privy or pit latrine arises, the privy will be upgraded to a sealed vault privy. Piped wastewater is not allowed to be connected to any privy for any reason. The addition of composting, incinerating, and recycling toilets may be installed inside the cabin in lieu of water-flushing toilets.

Water – If a water supply line is connected to the cabin, sewage is generated. Since sewage disposal facilities constructed prior to May 15, 1972 are grandfathered, water supply lines installed prior to May 15, 1972 can remain or be replaced if needed. Sewage generated must be disposed of properly. This can occur by a properly functioning OSS or a holding tank if the OSS malfunctions.

No new water supply sources will be allowed to be connected to the inside of the cabin. On a case-by-case basis, wells may be drilled on the campsite and outfitted with a hand pump or frost-free hydrant to allow for hand-carrying of water into the cabin. Manmade structures can also be constructed to pipe water from springs and streams to a collection point outside of the cabin to allow for hand-carrying of water into the cabin. If a newly approved water supply source, whether pressurized or piped, is found connected to the inside of a cabin without proper sewage disposal facilities, the SEO will require that the water supply line to the cabin be disconnected at the Owners expense.

Proof that installation of water supply systems or sewage disposal facilities occurred prior to May 15, 1972 is the sole responsibility of the Owner.