

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**  
**ALTERNATIVE ONSITE SEWAGE SYSTEMS (AOSS)**  
**(12VAC5-613)**

**Why did I receive this AOSS owner notification letter?**

Records on file at the Chesterfield/Powhatan County Health Department indicate that you are owner of a property served by an Alternative Onsite Sewage System (AOSS). The letter was meant to provide you with information regarding owner responsibilities and proper operation and maintenance of your AOSS under the new *Emergency Regulations for Alternative Onsite Sewage Systems*.

**How can I tell the difference between a conventional onsite sewage system and an alternative onsite sewage system (AOSS)?**

A conventional onsite sewage system is defined as “a treatment works system consisting of one or more septic tanks with gravity, pumped, or siphoned conveyance to a gravity sub surfaced drainfield”. A typical conventional onsite sewage system in Chesterfield/Powhatan County consist of a sewer line, two septic tanks, a conveyance line, a distribution box, header lines, and multiple absorption trenches. In most cases these components are not visible from the surface. (If the system requires a pump you will notice a riser roughly 12 inches above the ground surface.)

An alternative onsite sewage system is defined as “a treatment works system that is not a conventional onsite sewage system and does not result in a point source discharge. A point source discharge or direct discharge system requires a Health Department Permit and a Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Permit”. A typical alternative onsite sewage system in Chesterfield/Powhatan County consist of a sewer line, septic tank, treatment unit, pump chamber, conveyance line, distribution system, and absorption field (trenches, pad, drip tubing, etc.). With alternative systems there are typically multiple components visible from the ground surface, most notably the access to the treatment unit.

(12VAC5-613-10)

**I don't have an AOSS but I still received a letter. What do I do?**

If you believe you have received the AOSS owner notification letter in error please contact Lance Gregory, Environmental Health Supervisor, at (804) 748-1695.

## **I have an AOSS, so how do these new regulations affect me?**

Section 12VAC5-613-120 of the *Emergency Regulations* clearly states the owner responsibilities as it relates to the operation and maintenance of an AOSS. The responsibilities are as follows:

- 1) Maintain a relationship with an operator;
- 2) Have the AOSS operated and maintained by an operator;
- 3) Have an operator visit the AOSS at the frequency required by this chapter;
- 4) Have an operator collect any samples required by this chapter;
- 5) Keep a copy of the log provided by the operator on the property where the AOSS is located, make the log available to the department upon request, and make a reasonable effort to transfer the log to any future owner;
- 6) Keep a copy of the Operation and Maintenance Manual (O&M Manual) for the AOSS on the property where the AOSS is located, make the manual available to the department upon request, and make a reasonable effort to transfer the O&M Manual to any future owner; and
- 7) Comply with the onsite sewage system requirements contained in local ordinances adopted pursuant to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (§ 10.1-2100 et. Seq.) and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Designation and Management Regulations (9VAC10-20) when an AOSS is located within a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area.

## **When does this new regulation take affect?**

It became effective April 7, 2010. (12VAC5-613)

## **Why are these regulations going into affect now?**

There are four specific reasons for the adoption of these new *Emergency Regulations*.

1. The current performance requirements contained in the *Sewage Handling and Disposal Regulations* (SHDR) are inadequate for AOSS.
2. Statutory changes in 2008 (§ 32.1-163.5 of the *Code of Virginia*) allow licensed professional engineers to design AOSS that are not required to comply with the SHDR. Instead, these designs must be compliant with performance requirements established by the board. Since current performance requirements are inadequate, these regulations seek to establish measurable performance requirements appropriate for all AOSS, including the engineered designs under 32.1-163.5 of the *Code of Virginia*.
3. Proper operation and maintenance are essential to ensure that AOSS function as design.
4. To protect public health and the environment.

(12VAC5-613)

### **Are there any exemptions from this new regulation for existing system?**

No, but the permit application date will effect some aspects of the AOSS requirements. If the permit application date was on or after April 7, 2010, then the AOSS must abide by the performance requirements and laboratory sampling requirements. Any AOSS in operation prior to April 7, 2010; will abide by the performance requirements in effect at the time the system was permitted. (12VAC5-613-30)

### **Who can perform the maintenance of my AOSS?**

The only people authorized to perform maintenance on an AOSS are licensed Operator's by the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR). (12VAC5-613-10)

### **How can I locate an Operator?**

The Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) website has a search site. Under the section Onsite Sewage Professionals you will find a category for Operators. If you select Operator and put an Asterisk (\*) in the Name area you will get a complete list of Licensed Operators.

### **What is the cost of an Operator agreement?**

The basic agreement with an Operator can average \$300 to \$500. The actual cost of an agreement will depend on the type of AOSS you own and the maintenance provided for in the agreement. (Ex. Some Operator's may include the cost of sampling in the overall agreement, while others may charge an additional fee for sampling.)

### **What should I look for in an Operator agreement?**

The *Emergency Regulations* sets out specific guidelines for site visit and sampling requirements. The minimum site visit and sampling requirements for AOSS with flows less than 1,000 gallons per day (gpd) in operation prior to April 7, 2010 are:

- 1) Site visit every 12 months.
- 2) Routine maintenance as prescribed in the O&M Manual.

\* 12VAC5-613-30.D The laboratory sampling requirements of this chapter apply only to AOSS permitted pursuant to applications filed on or after the effective date of this chapter.

The minimum site visit and sampling requirements for AOSS with flows less than 1,000gpd going into operation on or after April 7, 2010 are:

- 1) An initial grab sample of the effluent from the treatment unit is required within the first 180 days of operation. (12VAC5-613-80.D.)
- 2) If the treatment unit has received general approval, a grab sample is required once every five years. For treatment units that have not received general approval four additional grab samples are required within the first two years, and annually thereafter. (12VAC5-613-80.D & 12VAC5-613-80.E)
- 3) Site visit with 180 calendar days of the issuance of the operation permit, and every 12 months thereafter.
- 4) Routine maintenance as prescribed in the O&M Manual.

These are the minimum requirements. Consult your O&M Manual for a more detailed operation and maintenance schedule. Then ask the Operator what is covered under their agreement and what their charges are for those items not included. (Ex. What do you charge for an alarm call?)

### **What do I need to know about my AOSS, and where can I find more information?**

The best place to find information concerning your particular AOSS is your Operation and Maintenance Manual (O&M Manual). Your O&M Manual should be written to be easily understood by any potential owner and should include:

- 1) A list of the components comprising the AOSS with dimensioned site layout and contact numbers for replacement parts for each unit process;
- 2) A list of any control functions and how to use them;
- 3) All operation, maintenance, sampling, and inspection schedules, including any requirements that exceed the minimum requirements of the regulations for the AOSS;
- 4) The performance data sampling and reporting schedule;
- 5) The limits of the AOSS design and how to operate the system within those design limits;
- 6) Other information deemed necessary or appropriate by the designer.

(12VAC5-613-150)

If you have not already received a copy of your O&M Manual, or have lost the original, a copy can be attained by contacting the designer of the AOSS. If you are unsure who the designer was, or are unable to contact the designer, you may get this information by contacting your Operator, builder, or the local health department.

**Are there different types of AOSS? Do different AOSS require more or less maintenance?**

Yes, there are many different types of AOSS. The amount/type of maintenance is directly related to the type of AOSS you own. While the *Emergency Regulations* set specific site visit, performance, and sampling requirements, it is your Operation and Maintenance Manual (O & M Manual) that will determine your “maintenance schedule”. Think of your O&M Manual like an Owners Manual for your car. You will need to repair components due to normal wear-and-tear. Which components and how often should be laid out in your O&M Manual.

**My house is not complete. Are there any new requirements for receiving a certificate of occupancy?**

Yes, the Health Department must have on file the name and license number of the Operator. The Health Department must have proof (a copy of the permit with a County Clerk stamp) that the AOSS type has been recorded on the deed. (12VAC5-613-60)

**\*\*Remember to keep a copy of the log provided by the operator. This log should include dates of each site visit conducted by the Operator, the finding of each site visit, and the results of any laboratory sampling that has been taken.**