

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



BUYING & SELLING A HOME WITH ON-SITE SEWAGE FACILITY (OSSF)

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Selling a Home with an OSSF, Continued

- Water standing in pipes or the field is a sign of a saturated system, clogged pipe or tank malfunction.
- Older fiberglass tanks do not perform well in rocky or clay soil. Damaged tanks are usually not repairable and require a permit for repairs. The entire system must be brought up to current standards and codes.
- Even aerobic systems that are recently serviced by a maintenance provider may require an inspection.

Summary

On-site sewage facilities systems do not last forever. They require upkeep, maintenance and pumping. The lifespan of an OSSF depends on the type of system, the proper design and installation of the system and proper maintenance. The purpose of a home inspection is to determine the real value of a property. Upon clarification, rarely will an issue with the OSSF prevent the sale of a home. The true cost of the property needs to be understood by the buyer to include the cost of necessary repairs for the property to be safe and habitable.



Selling a Home with an OSSF

Mortgage companies will usually require an inspection of the existing on-site sewage facility (OSSF) prior to the final sale. However, these inspections are not required by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality or WCCHD. Home inspection companies offer a wide range of inspections. Many consumers are informed about on-site wastewater systems and are prepared to pay for inspections. Buyers expect to buy a home with an OSSF that works efficiently and that will not bring surprises.

Although your system may appear to be operating adequately, the typical service life of an OSSF is 20 years. Be prepared to answer some questions from the buyer or realtor. Don't be surprised if they ask you to pay for evacuating the tank. The following are items to consider:

- Get site plans and paperwork early.
- Obtain a copy of the permit from WCCHD.
- Don't think if the toilet flushes its "ok."
- Pre-inspect to prevent surprises. Address any issues before you list your house.
- Find out the age of the system.
- Know where your septic tank is located because it may be inspected.
- Access ports will need to be uncovered for pumping.
- Some warning signs of problems are high grass around the tank and tree roots that have grown into the tank.
- Tank baffles in need of repair or high sludge levels warn of solids transfer.

Buying a Home with an OSSF

It is a State and Williamson County requirement to transfer the license to operate the on-site sewage facility (OSSF) to the new owners for systems which require routine maintenance (aerobic systems). Contact your local health department (WCCHD) for instructions on how to transfer the license into the new owner's name. WCCHD currently requires submittal of a transfer form, a current maintenance contract, a recent routine maintenance inspection report showing the system operating properly, and a fee. Systems that do not have a routine maintenance requirement do not require transfer into the new owner's name.

It is important to educate buyers at time of closing about the necessity of properly operating, maintaining and caring for their OSSF. Proper maintenance will help avoid costly future repairs, system replacement, damage to the environment, and legal issues.

You can reduce the risk of costly surprises by asking questions, visually inspecting the system and testing the system before buying a home.

Questions to ask about a home's OSSF:

- How does the OSSF work?
- Does the owner have a copy of the site plan & planning material for the OSSF? If not, copies of licensed systems can be requested from WCCHD.
- What is the water load approved on the license to operate (how many bedrooms)? Are there any discrepancies?

- What type of system is it?
- What technologies are in use?
- Is there a service history of the system?
- When was the tank last pumped?
- Has the system been in use recently?
- How much water did the previous owners use?
- Have there been any modifications since the septic was licensed (to the house or system)?
- How do I know if the system is working properly?
- How long will a system last?
- Is the tank water tight?
- Is there a history of complaints?
- Is system maintenance needed?
- What are my responsibilities as a property owner?

Required Licenses

The State and Williamson County require the following individuals to be licensed before working on any OSSF:

Installers, Apprentices, Site Evaluators, Maintenance Providers, Maintenance Technicians and Wastewater Transporters.

Contact WCCHD to verify licensure.

Steps to take when buying

1. Have the owner complete a disclosure!
2. Ask questions. Where is it, what is it and what is its service history?
3. Consider the legal status. Contact WCCHD to determine pending legal complaints.
4. Get outside information on the system.
5. Inspect for signs of trouble. Find the tank. Does anybody know the location of the tank? Are there tank risers installed? Has the tank been maintained or pumped?
6. Ask that the tank be pumped. Look for leaks, low water level, high water level, and thin or thick sludge and solid levels. (A broken tank may require a new system).
7. Look for high grass or dead grass areas.
8. Consider the need for additional inspections.
9. Find out clearance distances to gardens, vegetable gardens, fruit trees, decks and pools.
10. Rely on inspectors and licensed installers who are competent and have no conflict of interest.
11. Get a copy of the maintenance contract, if it is an aerobic system. Contact the maintenance provider for information.
12. Contact WCCHD for information on the OSSF. WCCHD can research their files on the property.