



Lewis County Public Health & Social Services
Health News

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Onsite Sewage Program Protects Environmental Health

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With its mostly rural nature, Lewis County is home to more people relying on septic systems than city sewer systems. The Lewis County Public Health & Social Services (LCPHSS) Onsite Sewage Program evaluates all aspects of septic systems to ensure they are built to regulatory and public health standards.

Onsite wastewater (septic) systems serve residences and businesses in the county that do not have a city sewer connection available. The onsite system is usually located on the same parcel as the source of wastewater. Its purpose is to prevent surface and ground water contamination and to dispose of wastewater below the ground surface so that people and animals will not come into contact with disease-causing organisms. The septic tank is a treatment unit where waste is reduced by bacterial activity.

If you are not sure how to locate your septic tank or drainfield on your property, septic program staff can help. Come to the Lewis County Public Services Building at 2025 NE Kresky Avenue in Chehalis (next to WSECU) and fill out a public records request. If the system was permitted, you should be able to get a copy of its as-built drawing.

A properly installed, maintained, and functioning septic system is important to protecting human health and the environment as a whole. As a result, program staff operate under the authority of the Lewis County Health Officer when enforcing state mandates and local health codes related to onsite sewage treatment.

Program staff evaluate site conditions for onsite septic systems, characteristics of soil in test pits, set permitting conditions, and issue permits for onsite septic systems. They review and comment on land development projects and activities such as subdivisions, Special Use Permits, Boundary

Line Adjustments, State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) documents, and other planning processes proposing onsite wastewater treatment and disposal.

The LCPHSS program covers systems up to 3,500 gallons per day capacity in all of Lewis County. This includes septic systems in cities where sewer hookups are not available. With no onsite sewage program staff of their own, cities rely on the county program to serve their residents.

A day in the life of an onsite program staffer is a combination of phone work, system design review, site inspections for new, repaired, or altered systems, test hole inspections to ensure the property has capacity to properly handle the anticipated outflow, and permit review. They work closely with contractors and land owners to educate and assist them in meeting all the requirements for an optimal system.

In 2018 Lewis County implemented a new system to streamline planning reviews. With these changes, reviews are completed in less time – potentially over-the-counter – so long as all the necessary information is submitted. Planners are available to ensure the completeness of the submittals and process the reviews. Applicants are encouraged to schedule an appointment to ensure that a planner is available to assist them.

Appointments for planning reviews are available:

- Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8:00 a.m. to noon.
- Tuesday and Thursday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Call (360) 740-2677 to schedule an appointment.

Failure symptoms: Mind the signs!

A foul odor is not always the first sign of a malfunctioning septic system. Call a septic professional if you notice any of the following:

- Wastewater backing up into household drains.
- Bright green, spongy grass on the drainfield, especially during dry weather.
- Pooling water or muddy soil around your septic system or in your basement.
- A strong odor around the septic tank and drainfield.

For more information about the Onsite Sewage Program or other environmental health issues, stop by the office on Kresky Avenue or visit <https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/environmental-health/>. Follow us on Twitter @LCPHSS.

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