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We here at Harrison County Environmental Health aim to assist you in understanding what the rules, laws, and guidelines are concerning the proper usage and treatment processes of your residential wastewater. The purpose of this informational packet is to eliminate as many of the misunderstandings in this arena as possible and get you started in the right direction. If you still have question concerning any wastewater/sewage matters or desire to obtain further training on how to do your own maintenance do not hesitate to contact us. Harrison County does provide a Homeowners Maintenance Course six times a year for single family homeowners at Texas State Technical College in Marshall. Our goal is to obtain the highest level of public safety and environmental health as possible. We are here to serve you.

Things You Should Know About Your OSSF



- 1. Where is all my wastewater going?**
- 2. How is it being treated?**
- 3. Do I have a legal system?**
- 4. Does it require maintenance, if so can I do it myself?**
- 5. Is it under contract or warranty?**
- 6. Is it operating properly, if not can I do my own repairs?**
- 7. Who do I call for questions or concerns about all of this?**

These are some of the common questions or information missing to many new homeowners who live outside the convenience of city sewer. Few homeowners actually are aware or understand how their On-Site Sewage Facility (O.S.S.F.) operates or in some cases if they even have one. So let's get started.

1. Where is all my wastewater going?

If you live outside the city limits your residential wastewater (i.e. what come out your sink, washer, toilets, etc.) is going into either a conventional septic or aerobic treatment unit. A conventional septic unit is going to be either a one or two tank series generally followed by a pipe and gravel, ET, Leaching Chambers, or gravelless pipe disposal field. An aerobic treatment unit is a two or three tank/compartiment unit composed of a trash tank (except for Nayadic and Multi-Flo systems), an aerobic treatment tank, and a pump tank. These tanks are then usually followed by a spray application or drip irrigation disposal field.

2. How is it being treated?

In conventional systems the wastewater flows into the first tank. As it fills up the heavier solids settle to the bottom and the lighter grease and oils rise to the surface creating a scum layer. Next the remaining liquid flows through baffle outlet located between the layers of scum and solids into either the second tank or the disposal field. If there is a second tank it will repeat the separation process to remove another layer of scum and solids before flowing into the disposal field. Then the last measure of treatment is the soil as the remaining fluid seeps downward.

Aerobic treatment units start the same way as a conventional. The wastewater flows into the trash tank for separation, and then flows into the aerobic unit where the aerator is feeding aerobic bacteria. These aerobic bacteria begin to eat on the sludge in the wastewater. Next the fluids pass into the clarifier chamber (within the aerobic unit), then into the pump tank which pumps the remaining fluid into the disposal field. Even though it has been treated it is still recommended to **avoid the mist from spray application systems.**

3. Do I have a legal system?

The simplest way to determine if you have a legal system is to call our office to see if it has been permitted. If it was installed prior to 1989 it probably was not permitted and you will need to verify that there are no existing problems such as oversaturated areas, bad odor, etc.

ATTENTION: conventional systems such as pipe and gravel, by state regulation, are to be only installed in class Ib, II, or III soils (these are your sandy and dark loam and silt soils) whether you have one acre or one hundred acres. These types of conventional systems cannot to be installed in clay soils (which is the majority of Harrison County).

If there is a complaint due to over saturated drain fields, bad odor, sewage surfacing, grey water (i.e. laundry water) you will be required at that time to come up to the current State standards for your O.S.S.F. The State also requires that if any O.S.S.F. is to be altered, repaired, or extended it must be permitted through the local authorities. Remember even though these situations may cost several thousand dollars, if it were to occur, it is for your safety. Failing systems are breeding grounds for a wide variety of diseases. It is worth the safety of you, your family, and the surrounding community to locate and eliminate these problems as soon as possible.

4. Does it require maintenance, if so can I do it myself?

Yes!!! Even conventional systems require some basic maintenance. With conventional systems the primary maintenance is to check if it is in need of being pumped out every two to three years by a TCEQ licensed pump technician. When it is pumped make sure it is washed out as well. The best way to avoid problems outside with your system is to monitor what is going inside your system from your house. You should avoid sending heavy amounts of cleaners and detergents, any prescription or non prescription drugs, no feminine hygiene products down your drains and toilets. Also look for toilet paper, tissues, dishwashing liquids, etc. that are labeled (usually in fine print) as RV or septic tank friendly. These products break down quicker, are safer for the environment, and cause much less problems in general.



If you are purchasing a new home that is served by an aerobic or septic system have it inspected before you buy. You should know what you are getting into before you run into a several thousand dollar problem.

For those with an aerobic treatment unit, Harrison County requires that all secondary treatment systems (i.e. aerobic) **must have (at all time) an ongoing maintenance contract** with a TCEQ licensed maintenance provider, be trained by TOWA's Basic Maintenance Course (\$295.00 two day course), **or be trained through Harrison County Homeowner OSSF Maintenance Course (\$125.00 4hr. course)**. For more information on how to become trained to do your own aerobic maintenance, contact our office at 903-938-8339.

5. Is it under contract or warranty?

For aerobic systems, if the home was built in the last two years or the system was installed recently, it is possible that it still has a warranty for any malfunctioning components due to normal wear and tear.

Also, regardless of how old the system is, if you are unsure if the system is currently covered by a maintenance contract, contact our office. It's important to know what steps will need to be taken to ensure your system is in state compliance.

6. Is it operating properly, if not can I do my own repairs?

The best way to ensure you are getting what you paid for and peace of mind is to have the system inspected by a TCEQ licensed maintenance provider. If the system has need of repair and is not up to current State standards, by current regulation, you **cannot alter, repair, or extend without a permit**. For systems that have been permitted it still would require a TCEQ licensed maintenance provider to make the repairs needed.

7. Who do I call for questions or concerns about all of this?

Whether it's about your system or concerns of neighboring systems, feel free to contact us Mon. – Fri. 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. We are here to assist you in keeping Harrison County environmentally safe for years to come.

For more information on on-site regulation go to TCEQ's website @ www5.tceq.state.tx.us/