

Revision of Chapter 246-272A WAC, Homeowner Cost Impacts at a Glance



The State Board of Health and Department of Health worked with interested parties and a diverse group of advisors to modernize the septic system rules while minimizing added demands on system owners. The proposed rules aim to increase protection while mitigating costs to owners. The following list highlights several features of the proposed rules that help control costs and ease implementation of the proposed rules.

Connecting Failed Septic Systems to Sewer Systems (WAC 246-272A-0025)

This section sets new ways to deal with failed septic systems near sewers. The new rule bases the 200-foot requirement on distance to the sewage connection point (building drain) instead of the property line. This should mean fewer buildings needing to connect based on distance to sewer service.

Expanding the Definition of Minor Repairs (WAC 246-272A-0200 & 0282)

The proposed rules expand the definition of “minor repairs” to add system fixes considered relatively routine and low risk. This will lower costs for homeowners. It should also help speed up repairs and cut the number of required local permits.

Connecting Multiple Dwellings to a Septic System (WAC 246-272A-0230)

The proposed rule makes it easier to permit and connect multiple residences, such as accessory dwelling units, to a single septic system. The proposal allows owners to add new buildings to septic systems based only on the number of bedrooms.

Allowing Smaller Drainfields with Better Treatment (WAC 246-272A-0234)

The proposal allows an option for owners to build a septic system with higher treatment in exchange for a smaller drainfield. This allows owners to build on a smaller footprint and may make smaller lots more buildable.

Adding Design Requirements to Facilitate Inspections and Maintenance (WAC 246-272A-0238)

The proposed rule changes language to allow more affordable, less intrusive, and safer inspection of drainfields. The design features also facilitate more thorough inspections and can help speed up and lower the cost of inspections.

Expanding Property Transfer Inspection of Septic Systems (WAC 246-272A-0270)

Building on required property transfer inspections (PTI) in many local health jurisdictions, this requirement extends time-of-sale inspection of septic systems statewide. Timely inspection of septic systems can help consumers/buyers avoid purchasing properties with problem or failing septic systems. Local health jurisdictions can waive PTI inspections for properties with up-to-date inspection records.

Limiting Changes to Local Management Plans (WAC 246-272A-0015)

The proposed rule includes modest changes for Puget Sound counties, mostly related to improved data

On-Site Sewage System Loan Program

Since the rules were last revised, the Washington Department of Health collaborated with partner agencies and institutions to scale up and capitalize a statewide low-interest loan program to help homeowners repair and replace failing and malfunctioning septic systems. Craft3 administers this essential homeowner finance program. Visit Craft3's website at:

<https://www.craft3.org/homeowner-loans/clean-water/washington>

reporting and management plan updates. There are no significant local management plan (LMP) changes for local health jurisdictions elsewhere in the state. This helps lower local program costs for managing septic systems but does limit some oversight services. Local health jurisdictions can grow their management programs as needed and as financial resources allow.

Adding Provisions for Remediation (WAC 246-272A-0282)

The proposed rule lets local health jurisdictions adopt policies to allow practices/technologies to remediate or restore a failed drainfield. In limited circumstances, remediation may be cheaper for drainfield rehabilitation. Approved remediation must not damage the septic system or result in insufficient drainfield soil for treatment.

Updating Minimum Lot Size, Land Area, and Alternate Methods of Treatment in Subdivisions. (WAC 246-272A-0320)

The proposed rule includes several land-related amendments and related efforts to mitigate cost impacts. Balancing technical recommendations for sufficient treatment and minimum land needs, the proposed amendments include:

- Minimal increases in lot sizes based on soil type.
- The addition of minimum standards for available land area (actual useable/buildable area of a lot) for septic system and reserve area.
- New ways to determine more dense subdivisions when coupled with higher levels of treatment to reduce nitrogen effects on water resources and neighboring properties.

Septic system safety and public health

In communities without sewers, septic systems are crucial for treating domestic sewage. Properly functioning septic systems keep sewage out of sight and out of mind, while keeping it out of playgrounds, water supplies, and food sources. However, when they malfunction or fail, they can contaminate our communities and pose a serious threat to public health.

Septic systems are expensive appliances. While sewer users pay fees to fund the operation of their wastewater treatment plant, septic system owners are responsible for the costs of operating and maintaining their septic system.

Recommending Phased Implementation of the Rules

The Department of Health is asking the State Board of Health to consider delayed start dates for the proposed rules. This will allow time for training and to develop effective support statewide.

For more information, please visit our website at: <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/wastewater-management/rules-and-regulations/onsite-rule-revision>



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