

Sand Filter and Pressure Distribution Maintenance

Septic system owners are responsible for the maintenance of their system. For sand filter or pressure distribution system owners, this includes control of soil erosion over the sand filter, control of large perennial plants, keeping livestock off the system, control of burrowing animals, and performing routine maintenance inspections and tasks.

Important: Please take the appropriate safety precautions while performing these maintenance requirements. Sewage contains harmful bacteria and viruses.

Required inspections

Oregon Administrative Rule 340-71-290(7) states that the septic tank and dosing tank must be inspected every 3 years for sludge and scum accumulation. The septic tank(s) must be pumped before surface floating scum accumulations within the tank are within three inches from the bottom of the outlet tee and when sludge from the bottom of the tank is six inches below the bottom of the outlet tee.

Maintenance

DEQ recommends pumping the septic tank when the solids accumulation is 35 percent of the tank volume. Pumping the dosing tank, or pump chamber of a two-compartment tank, at the same time is also recommended.

Test the pump and alarm operation at least once each year by manually lifting each float switch inside of the dosing tank of pump chamber.

Test pump cycle volume by measuring the sewage level in the tank at the start of pumping and again at pump turn-off. The proper pump cycle volume on a residential sand filter is ten percent (or 45 gallons per cycle) and a rule of thumb is about four inches in a concrete two-compartment septic tank or two inches in a single compartment dosing septic tank. Pressure distribution drainfields can receive 90 gallons per pump cycle – that’s twice as much so double the rule of thumb values for visual reference.

Inspect the screen around the pump at least once each year and clean as necessary. It needs to be cleaned when it is about 50 percent clogged.

Wash the pump screen over the septic tank manhole.

Flush sand filter and pressure distribution drainfield pipes. Sand filter and pressure distribution systems constructed after 1995 should have cleaning valves at the ground surface. Flush the lateral pressure distribution pipes within the sand filter and pressure distribution systems at least once a year. Flush each lateral pipe separately and be mindful of the liquid level in the tank (don’t run the pump dry).



Sand filter squirt test during system construction.

Cars require air and oil filter inspections, cleaning and replacement to keep performing, and these systems do too! These systems are expensive to construct and need care to last as long as possible.

Sound like more than you want to take on yourself? There are maintenance providers that do this every day. Our website lists [certified maintenance providers](#), though one doesn’t need to be certified to perform maintenance on residential sand filters or pressure distribution systems. As with hiring any contractor, check references.

Alternative Formats

Alternative formats of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ’s Office of Communications & Outreach for more information at (503) 229-5696.

Hearing impaired dial 711.



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Water Quality Onsite Program Eugene

165 East 7th Ave
Eugene, OR 97401
Phone: (541) 687-7338
Fax: (541) 686-7551
Toll Free: (800) 844-8467
Contact: Randy Trox
www.oregon.gov/DEQ

Western Region Coos Bay

381 N. Second St
Coos Bay, OR 97420
Phone: (541) 269-2721
Fax: (541) 269-7984
Toll Free: (800) 452-4011

Western Region Medford

221 Stewart Ave, Suite 201
Medford, OR 97501
Phone: (541) 776-6010
Fax: (541) 776-6262
Toll Free: (877) 823-3216

Eastern Region Bend

475 NE Bellevue Dr
Suite 110
Bend, OR 97701
Phone: (541) 388-6146
Fax: (541) 388-8283
Toll Free: (866) 863-6668

Eastern Region Pendleton

700 SE Emigrant, Suite 330
Pendleton, OR 97801
Phone: (541) 276-4063
Fax: (541) 278-0168
Toll Free: (800) 304-3513

Northwest Region N. Coast Branch

65 N Highway 101
Suite 202
Warrenton, OR 97146
Phone: (503) 861-3280
Fax: (503) 861-3259
Toll Free: (800) 452-4011