



FAQs: Local Agency Management Program for Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems

What is the Local Agency Management Program (LAMP) and when did it take effect?

The LAMP is a document which develops minimum standards for Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS) within San Luis Obispo County. The purpose of the LAMP is to allow the continued use of OWTS within the jurisdiction of SLO County and to expand the local program to permit and regulate non-conventional OWTS (NOWTS) while protecting water quality and public health. The LAMP was adopted by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board on September 25, 2020 and was adopted by the SLO County Board of Supervisors on June 8, 2021. It has been adopted by reference to the County Building and Construction Ordinance, Title 19, Chapter 7.

How does the Local Agency Management Program affect homeowners?

For homeowners or property owners with existing functioning septic systems, there is no change. A homeowner with an existing septic system would be affected if there was a failure of the system or a remodel on the house which added a bedroom(s) and/or other development on the property such as an accessory dwelling unit with plumbing fixtures. Property owners that will be constructing a new OWTS will need to meet the requirements of the approved LAMP.

What is the difference between a 'septic system' and an 'onsite wastewater treatment system' (OWTS)?

Nothing. The term 'septic system' has been replaced in the industry with 'onsite wastewater treatment system' to reflect the changing technologies in the onsite industry. Conventional septic systems installed 30-40 years ago were designed primarily as disposal systems, the newer technologies can treat wastewater to make it cleaner than traditional technology.

What are the major changes in the Local Agency Management Program?

Engineered design: All proposed septic treatment systems must be designed by a registered professional. As-built plans will be required for all septic systems that deviate from the originally approved design plans.

System component setbacks: Setbacks for building footings, property lines, reservoirs and public water system supply wells will increase from current standards.

Replacement of failing systems: Systems that fail or require corrective action may not be restored to the original design and may require installation of supplemental treatment components.

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Slope allowances: Septic systems may be permitted on slopes up to 40% with a slope stability report. This is an increase from the previous standards.

Secondary residences and accessory dwelling units: System capacity and design requirements for secondary residences and accessory dwelling units will change.

Risers and filters: All new septic systems will require risers to grade and effluent filters.

Leach line loading rates: All leach line loading rates will increase, generally requiring additional leach lines and lines of greater lengths.

Seepage pit design criteria: Design criteria for seepage pits will be more restrictive with respect to groundwater separation. The LAMP will allow for the use of seepage pits when certain criteria is met and upholds prohibition of hollow seepage pits.

Supplemental treatment system allowance: The County will be able to approve and permit alternative and supplemental treatment systems that previously required review by the Central Coast Water Board.

What is the difference between a conventional and non-conventional OWTS with alternative/supplemental treatment?

A conventional septic system consists of three main parts: septic tank, drainfield (commonly leach lines) and soil beneath the drainfield. They are used where municipal sewer is not available. Non-conventional OWTS (NOWTS) provide some type of advanced treatment in addition to the primary treatment that occurs in a conventional septic tank. Further treatment reduces nitrogen, biological oxygen demand (BOD), Total Suspended Solids (TSS), and in some cases provides disinfection or alternate methods of effluent dispersal. Most supplemental systems consist of a second tank with filters and/or aerators in addition to the primary tank.

Have supplemental OWTS technologies been tested, and are they safe?

Supplemental treatment technologies have been around for over 40 years. Typically, the additional treatment components will have an NSF certification (National Sanitation Foundation).

Will all new OWTS require supplemental treatment?

No. Conventional septic systems will still be the standard method of disposing and treating of wastewater onsite. An NOWTS is required when certain site conditions exist such as very fast percolation rates, shallow groundwater, or the site is located in a Nitrogen Impact Area.

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Which areas are designated as Moderate and Severe Nitrogen Impact Areas?

Wastewater contains high concentrations of nitrogen, which can degrade groundwater quality. Several focus areas with groundwater nitrate impacts were identified and introduced in the LAMP. Area specific requirements are designed to minimize the potential for groundwater nitrate loading. Areas within the moderate and severe impact areas include portions of Los Osos, Santa Margarita, Creston, Shandon, Templeton, and Paso Robles. To view these areas on the County GIS viewer please search 'nitrogen' in the layers and select 'LAMP Nitrogen Loading Areas'.

How much does an NOWTS with alternative/supplemental treatment cost?

The initial cost will vary depending on the type of technology used and site-specific conditions. Alternative septic systems are essentially miniature wastewater treatment plants, with complex technology and machinery. Recent estimates indicate that costs associated with the components and installation of a non-conventional system serving a single-family residence can range from \$50,000 to \$90,000+.

Are special permits required for alternative/supplemental septic systems?

Yes. Supplemental treatment systems will require an annual operating permit from the Planning & Building Department with an associated fee. The permit will require owners to verify that the system is in good working condition and fully operational on an annual basis. Sample collection and analysis is also part of the annual inspection.

Will I be required to upgrade my septic system when I sell my house?

No. There are no retrofit-on-sale requirements associated with the County of San Luis Obispo LAMP.

Will the County require me to pump my septic tank and what will happen if I do not pump it?

No, the County will not require owners to pump their septic tank. However, the County highly recommends all residential septic tanks be pumped every three to five years. This requirement is not codified; however, letting solids accumulate in the septic tank over time can cause a septic system failure. Septic failures are very costly as they usually require abandoning the existing leach field and finding another area on the parcel suitable for the installation of a new leach field.

If a homeowner wants to add an accessory dwelling unit (ADU), can it be connected to the existing septic system for the main house?

Yes, in some situations. ADUs less than 800 square feet may use or modify existing OWTS to meet additional demand. ADUs 800-1200 square feet must utilize a new OWTS with distinct reserve area. To

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use an existing system, the tank size and dispersal system shall be demonstrated to be capable of handling the additional effluent.

Can I utilize SB-9 to split a lot served by OWTS?

If the lot size is big enough, yes. The minimum parcel size for new parcels which utilize OWTS is determined by average rainfall. Within SLO County minimum parcel size ranges from 1-2.5 acres depending on rainfall. This means that the original lot must be 2-5 acres to split a lot or utilize the development components of SB-9. Currently there is no allowance for deviation from these lot sizes depicted in Table 1 of LAMP (Section 2.D.4). Please see the Countywide Rainfall Coverage Map or contact P&B to determine minimum parcel size in your area.