

CHATHAM HEALTH DISTRICT

Sewing the Towns of East Haddam, East Hampton, Haddam, Hebron, Marlborough & Portland

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Wastewater Pumping and Permit to Discharge Frequently asked Questions and Answers

The Chatham Health District has adopted a Wastewater Pumping and Permit to Discharge Regulation effective March of 2009. The regulation can be viewed at our website, www.chathamhealth.org, under the regulations, licensing and inspection section, and then by going to septic systems link. We are currently implementing the regulation and have prepared this release to answer the most frequently asked questions.

Q. – *Where did the Chatham Health District come up with this idea of requiring a pump out permit?*

A. – The requirement to obtain a pumping permit has been part of the State of Connecticut Public Health Code since 1982. This covers residential and small commercial systems discharging less than 5,000 gallons per day.

Q. – *I've heard that the Chatham Health District is requiring information from the pumping companies that they've never supplied before. Is that true?*

A. – The information is the same information required by code since 1982. It is nothing new, but the companies were never asked to supply the information until now.

Q. – *Is it true that the pumping companies must now register with the Health District?*

A. - Yes, but there is no fee involved and almost no paperwork. Once a pumping company has registered, they are listed on our website (www.chathamhealth.org). This allows the public to have a list of pumping companies that are licensed to pump septic tanks in the State of Connecticut and who are also familiar with the ordinance.

Q. – *I've been told that I should apply for a renewal for my Permit to Discharge. What is a Permit to Discharge?*

A. – A permit to discharge is a legal permit issued by the local health department (in this case Chatham Health District) that approves the amount of wastewater being discharged to your septic system. The authority to issue such a permit has been delegated from the State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection to the State Health Department and through them to the local health department. This has been part of State Statutes since 1977. The original permit to discharge assured you that the system was constructed and would function in compliance with the public health code.

Q. – *Why should I renew it? My septic system has been in the ground for years now without a problem.*

A. – Septic systems, just like other household systems (such as plumbing, heating, electric) need a certain amount of maintenance to continue to function properly. The permit to discharge is the compliance statement for the system owner. To renew a permit to discharge, you must have a satisfactory pump out report. This is provided by the registered pumping company after they pump the tank. While the tank is being pumped, the registered pumper checks for damage to the tank and baffles. Often, if damage is detected early, less expensive repairs can be made to preserve the systems components.

Q. – *Is there a fee charged by the District to pump my tank?*

A. – No, the District charges a fee of \$30 every five years when you apply to renew the permit to discharge. You may well pump your tank every 2 or 3 years. The fee is not for your pump out, just the permit renewal.

Q. - *Why should the District charge anything at all?*

A. - The District fee recoups some of the administrative cost of implementing the program. All of the pump out reports and permits to discharge are being recorded in a database which is then used to generate reminders to pump out (if not done within 5 years). Additionally, when your local sanitarian reviews the permit to discharge renewal, he or she reviews changes to the public health code, or changes made to your system if repairs have been made, or even changes that have been made to your house that have a bearing on your legal discharge. For example, if you added a bedroom to a three bedroom house but you still have a three bedroom septic system, it is important to note on the permit to discharge that the flow be based on that of a three bedroom home instead of a four. Many reports require follow-up, and some systems require an onsite visit from a sanitarian.

Q. – *Where does the five years come from?*

A. – Language in the statute and technical standards have set renewals for Permits to Discharge at five years. As a practical matter, very few septic systems should be pumped less frequently than every five years in order to catch problems early.

Q. – *My neighbor didn't get a card to pump his tank and his house is way older than mine. Why?*

A. - The mailing of the requirement to system owners began with those systems constructed (either for new homes or as repaired systems) from January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2004. Next year it will include those systems January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005. We will also contact those property owners regarding systems for which we receive a pump-out report that does not have a current permit to discharge (usually older systems constructed before permits to discharge were issued).

Q. – *I've heard that people submitting building permits need to have a valid permit to discharge. Is this true?*

A. – Yes. For those properties where permits to discharge were never issued or permits have expired, building projects are the perfect time to review what a property has for a system and assure that it is being maintained. The health department has reviewed such plans for additions, accessory structures and changes in use even before the implementation of this regulation.

Q. – *My registered pumping company has charged me an extra \$30 for the pumping permit. Is that the \$30 permit to discharge renewal?*

A. – No. The permit to Discharge renewal is paid directly to the District by the property owner. The application fee is on our website (www.chathamhealth.org) under forms. It is listed as **Re-issue permit to Discharge application**.

Many system owners have a current permit to discharge and do pump their tanks. For system owners, this regulation will provide a record of maintenance and a statement of compliance regarding the system that is always current through the issuance of the permit to discharge. There are 17,000 septic systems in the District discharging an estimated 7 million gallons of sewage into the ground every day. Over half were installed before 1982, prior to any technical standards for construction and no permits to discharge were ever issued. In comparison, the regional wastewater treatment plant in East Hampton discharges 1.3 million gallons per day and is monitored daily for compliance with its discharge permit.

This regulation provides tool to evaluate those septic systems for wastewater planning. For instance, we have received to date 1000 pump-out reports in nine months. We now know that only 33% of systems are maintained (pumped) at least once every five years. That is not a statistic protective of public health or supportive of sewer avoidance.

When we passed the regulation, we began enforcing a very old requirement, which is still unknown too much of the public. To get the word out, we held public hearings, published the requirements, gave public presentations, wrote articles and noticed persons directly by mail. Additionally, we fielded hundreds of resident phone calls. As with any new regulation, there are individuals who are not aware of those changes. We remain committed to getting the word out and assisting residents with their questions and concerns. Informational meetings about the regulation to answer questions will be scheduled. We can be reached at the main office at 860 365-0884, or at your town office

Thad King
Director of Health

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