

Frequently asked questions

What is the pump-out ordinance?

Multiple jurisdictions in Virginia have enacted ordinances requiring pumping of septic tanks. In Loudoun County, Chapter 1066 of the Loudoun County Codified Ordinance was amended by the Board of Supervisors on October 4, 2011. The text of the ordinance amendment follows:

*b) Except as provided herein, for all individual sewage disposal systems not requiring a Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) permit, **the owner shall cause a maintenance pump-out of the septic tank of each such system to be performed by a septic tank cleaner licensed by the Loudoun County Health Department at least once every 5 years and shall provide documentation of the subject maintenance at the request of the County.** Licensed septic tank cleaners shall report all pump-outs in a manner acceptable to the Loudoun County Health Department on a biweekly basis and shall provide the homeowner with a copy of the information reported. Notwithstanding the foregoing, for Alternative Onsite Sewage Systems (AOSSs), in lieu of the required 5-year pump-out, the owner may submit documentation, certified by an individual who is licensed or certified under Chapter 23 (§ 54.1-2300 et seq.) of Title 54.1 of the Code of Virginia as being qualified to operate, monitor, and maintain an AOSS, that the system has been inspected, is functioning properly, and the tank does not need to be pumped out.*

Why do septic tanks need to be pumped out?

Routine tank pump outs are a critical step in helping to prevent premature failure of a system with resultant repair or replacement costs. Septic tanks are designed to trap solids and scum before they enter the rest of the treatment system where they can cause damage. If the tank is not pumped regularly it could lead to poor system performance, backups, reduced system life, well contamination and premature failure.

How will the ordinance be implemented?

The effective date of the ordinance is July 1, 2012. To best meet owners' needs, conventional system owners will be encouraged to have their tanks pumped in groups (20% per year) over the next five years with the goal of having all tanks pumped by July 1, 2017. Gradual implementation will help avoid service delays from overwhelmed pumpers and dump stations. Tanks should be pumped immediately when they are determined to be at capacity rather than waiting for notification. Initial postcards will go out to all owners of conventional onsite septic systems in March, 2012. Reminder postcards will then be sent in groups, starting with the oldest systems first, in order to reduce demands on the septage handling system.

How does this ordinance impact owners of alternative onsite septic systems?

Alternative systems are currently being visited by an inspector each year; these inspectors will now have the additional responsibility of inspecting the tanks on site and verifying that they do, or do not need to be pumped. Tanks that have not been uncovered in previous inspections must now be uncovered for these inspections. If the

inspector reports that a tank pump-out is needed, the tank should soon be pumped. The inspection option is not available for conventional systems.

Is every 5 years the proper frequency?

The ordinance requires pumping at five years for conventional systems. While the recommended frequency for pumping a specific system depends on the system use and size of the tank, five years was determined to be a reasonable minimum pumping frequency for the average system. Many tanks need to be pumped more frequently than every five years based on usage. If a garbage disposal is used, recommended pumping frequency can increase by 50%.

What does it cost to replace an onsite sewage disposal system?

Replacement costs will vary depending on the type of onsite sewage disposal system. Costs may range from \$7,000 to replace a gravity flow conventional system to \$50,000 or more for an alternative sewage disposal system.

Who do I call to pump my tank?

The company must be operated by an onsite sewage system operator licensed by the Loudoun County Health Department. A list of licensed operators can be found at: <http://va-loudouncounty.civicplus.com/index.aspx?NID=1428>.

How is my tank pump-out tracked?

When your tank is pumped, your operator enters pump-out information into a web based database called OnlineRME™, which notifies the Health Department that your tank has been pumped. Once the pump-out information is received, owners will not be sent additional notices until the system is due to be pumped again, in five years. If the tank is pumped more frequently than five years, the owner may never see a reminder notice.

Are operators required to enter the pump-out data in the OnlineRME™ database?

Yes. If the operator does not report the information in OnlineRME™, owners who have their tank pumped may still not be in compliance with the ordinance.

What will the onsite sewage system operator do when he arrives to pump my tank?

The operator will locate and uncover your tanks if no access exists. The operator will then pump the tank(s). Tanks should be pumped completely with no solids left in the bottom. It is recommended that sanitary tees and the tank itself be inspected for soundness and water tightness; if a tank is leaking, it can cause premature system failure and be a source of groundwater pollution. Filters, if present, should also be cleaned at this time.

I have an alternative system, what am I required to do?

Alternative system owners are already required by Loudoun County Codified Ordinance Chapter 1067 to have their system inspected annually and should not receive pump out reminder cards. The system operator is required to inspect the septic tank(s) during

the annual visit to determine if pumping is needed. If the tank is buried it will have to be uncovered for inspection.

Will uncovering the tank make a mess in my yard?

Unfortunately, some tanks were installed without risers to allow for easy access. In these situations, uncovering a tank, especially if it is deep, can be expensive and leave a mess. Tanks that have a small 6” inspection riser must still be uncovered for pump-out since it is impossible to do an adequate job of pumping a tank through a small opening. Future digging can be avoided by installing an access riser to just below or above the surface. The riser is recommended to go over the inlet since more solids tend to accumulate at the inlet side.

I still have questions or concerns about this ordinance. Who can I contact for more information?

Our goal is to implement this new ordinance in a manner that best meets the needs of homeowners and operators. Please contact the Health Department by phone at 703-777-0234 or by email at health@loudoun.gov if you have any questions or concerns about this ordinance or about any other public health issue in Loudoun County.