

So, You Need a Septic Management Plan...



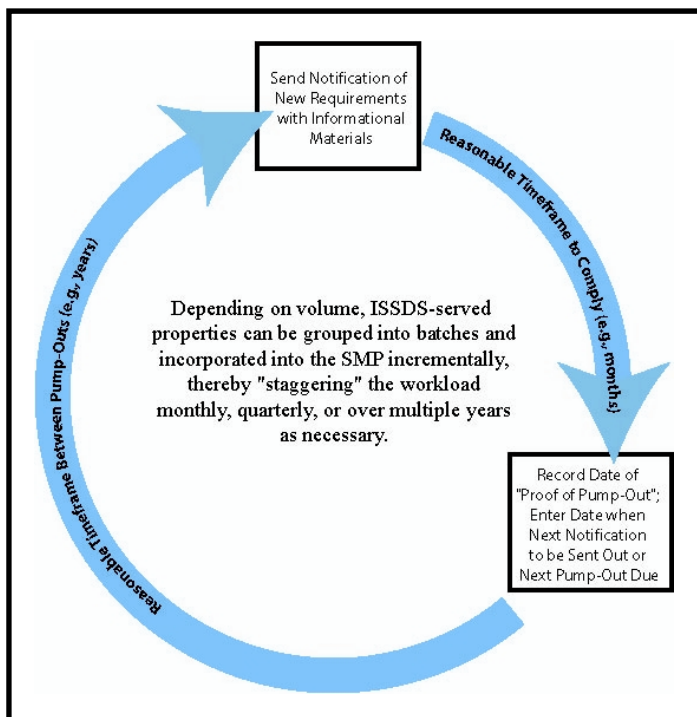
Pursuant to the adoption of the new Water Quality Management Planning (WQMP) rules at N.J.A.C. 7:15-5.25(e)3, Wastewater Management Planning (WMP) agencies are required to implement a Septic Management Plan (SMP) for areas within their jurisdictions that are served by individual subsurface sewage disposal systems (ISSDSs). The SMP can be implemented by the County WMP agency, County Health Department or individual municipalities. In order to comply with N.J.A.C. 7:15-5.25(e)3, each SMP must lay out the framework and enforceable procedures for the routine maintenance of all ISSDSs within each WMP area. Routine maintenance includes regular pumping out of the ISSDSs at an appropriate frequency.

More comprehensive programs are allowable and can enhance the environmental benefit of a SMP. The WQMP requires only a basic approach that will inventory ISSDSs and track and enforce routine maintenance of the ISSDSs within each municipality. Therefore, an approvable SMP can be developed by completing the following tasks:

- Locate all ISSDSs within applicable municipal jurisdiction(s);
- Establish a database system to inventory ISSDSs and track routine maintenance;
- Establish through ordinance or other mechanism the means to enforce the required maintenance;
- Provide educational and program information to all residents served by ISSDSs.

Figure 1. Schematic of a basic Septic Management Plan.

The steps of a typical, basic SMP are illustrated in Figure 1: persons or other entity responsible for the maintenance of an ISSDSs are identified; notification is sent describing the new requirements, including the pump-out schedule, and providing educational materials; when proof of the required pump-out is received (such as a copy of a receipt from a licensed hauler), the date is noted and that ISSDS "account" is deemed current until the next scheduled maintenance action. A reasonable timeframe for the frequency of pump-outs is typically 3 years, but will be determined by the counties and municipalities, as will reasonable timeframes for compliance and measures to address non-compliance. This is appropriate as local entities are most familiar with their area's soils and topography, as well as population densities and development trends. More information about appropriate pump-out frequencies is provided in the Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension Fact Sheet: *Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems: The Maintenance and Care of Your Septic System*, available at <http://www.water.rutgers.edu> (Click on Fact Sheets).



Implementation of a basic SMP, therefore, is a straightforward and repeatable cycle, for which most of the steps can be accomplished through the mail and using a spreadsheet database program to organize ISSDS inventories and track maintenance activities. For example, Table 1 illustrates a typical spreadsheet that contains all the key components. The best means to populate the inventory of ISSDSs will vary among WMP areas and will depend on the degree to which an inventory already exists and which entities possess the relevant information, such as health departments, planning boards, tax assessors, or others. Once those properties being served by ISSDSs are identified and inventoried, tracking is straight-forward and can be designed to require minimal resources. Where the number of ISSDSs to be inventoried and tracked is small, the notification and pumping schedule can be the same for all. In large communities or where numerous properties are served by ISSDSs, the responsible entity could elect to send out a manageable number of notices each month or quarter, including over a multi-year period, with appropriately assigned pump-out schedules, thereby staggering the workload into smaller, more reasonable increments.

Table 1. Example of a spreadsheet to inventory and track ISSDSs within a jurisdiction.

Name of Owner, Person or Entity Responsible for ISSDS Maintenance	Mailing Address (of Responsible Party)	Address and Block/Lot of Property with ISSDS (if different from Responsible Party)	Date Notice Sent	Pump-Out Required By: (reasonable timeframe to comply)	Pump-Out Date Certified: (validated w/copy of receipt from licensed hauler)	Send Next Notice: (reasonable timeframe between pump-outs)

Various SMP strategies and ordinances have already been adopted in New Jersey, as described in Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension Fact Sheet # FS533, *Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems: Operating Permits*, available at <http://www.water.rutgers.edu> (Click on Fact Sheets), and the list of additional resources contained therein. To assist with data management beyond what Table 1 above would provide, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has developed The Wastewater Information System Tool (TWIST), an off-the-shelf, user-friendly management tool that will allow local health and planning entities to effectively inventory and manage small wastewater treatment systems in their jurisdictions. TWIST can be accessed at <http://www.epa.gov/> (Type TWIST CD-ROM into search tool). Some municipalities have implemented approaches that involve individual operator permits as the means to inventory and regulate the ISSDSs, ISSDS inspections in lieu of automatically scheduled pump-outs, and fees to help finance the programs. For the purposes of the WQMP rule requirement for a SMP, any means that will establish an enforceable program to achieve regular maintenance of ISSDSs is acceptable. Any WMP agency that requires additional guidance in establishing a compliant SMP or is interested in obtaining information on a more comprehensive program is encouraged to contact the Division of Watershed Management at (609) 984-6888.

NOTE: Only ISSDSs that discharge 2,000 gallons per day (gpd) or less are subject to the SMP provisions of the WQMP rule. Onsite wastewater treatment systems that discharge greater than 2,000 gpd are regulated through NJPDES permits.