

Onsite Wastewater System (OWS)

Reconnection and Expansion after Fourmile Canyon Fire



Due to circumstances related to the fire, there will not be enforcement action for unapproved septic systems or fees for those who wish to reconnect their unapproved septic system to a replacement dwelling. You will, however, need to submit a complete application to reconnect to Boulder County Public Health (BCPH) before doing so.

Also, if the house is sold or goes through any land use review or building permit after it has been rebuilt, the unapproved septic systems will need to be replaced. Below is the process for review of an OWS.

Approved OWS

1. Check the status of your OWS and the number of bedrooms your system is approved for at www.SepticSmart.org; click on “check permit.”
2. To reconnect to your existing approved OWS, complete an OWS permit application (www.SepticSmart.org; click on “forms”) and bring it to BCPH at 3450 Broadway in Boulder.
 - If you plan to rebuild in the same location, with the **same number of bedrooms** as the OWS was approved for, no additional work is necessary.
 - If you plan to rebuild in another location, with the **same number of bedrooms** as the OWS was approved for, all required setbacks must be met. Call 303.441.1564 to schedule an appointment with a BCPH environmental health specialist.
 - If you plan to rebuild with the **same the number of bedrooms** recorded in the Boulder County Assessor’s property record, and this number is larger than what the OWS is approved for, you may connect to the existing OWS. However, it is recommended that the system be upgraded to support the larger structure. If the system is not upgraded and is connected back to the existing OWS, the system will no longer be considered approved, and will be expected to comply by 2023 (see strategies on the following page).
 - If you plan to rebuild and **expand the number of bedrooms** beyond what is recorded in the Boulder County Assessor’s property records, and for which the OWS is approved, the system must be upgraded. Normal permitting and fees will apply.

Unapproved OWS

1. Check the status of your OWS and the number of bedrooms your system is approved for at www.SepticSmart.org; click on “check permit”.
2. To reconnect to your existing unapproved OWS, complete an OWS permit application (www.SepticSmart.org; click on “forms”) and bring it to BCPH at 3450 Broadway in Boulder.
 - a. If you plan to rebuild in the **same location**, with the **same number of bedrooms** as reported in the Boulder County Assessor’s Office property records, the location of the OWS must be verified. If it cannot be verified, a new system will be required, and the normal permitting process will apply.
 - b. If you plan to rebuild and **expand the number of bedrooms** beyond what is recorded in the the Boulder County Assessor’s Office property records, the system must be upgraded. Normal permitting and fees will apply.
 - c. If you plan to rebuild with the **same number of bedrooms** as listed in the Boulder County Assessor’s Office property records, but in **another location**, the location of the OWS must be verified. If it cannot be verified, a new system is required, and the normal permitting process applies.

If you are unsure whether your OWS is approved or unapproved, please contact BCPH at 303.441.1564 and staff will be happy to assist you.

Check. Permit. Update. Approve.

SepticSmart Strategies

Eighteen percent of the septic systems in Boulder County are unapproved, which means that we know nothing about how they were constructed or installed. In addition, 80% of those, and 30% of the approved systems are older than the typical life expectancy of a septic system.

To protect our waters, Boulder County Public Health (BCPH) aims to ensure all septic systems in the county are approved by December 31, 2023. The following strategies will help to meet this goal.

Complaint investigations identifying failing systems: BCPH staff currently conduct site visits in response to complaints of failing septic systems. When investigations identify failure, BCPH begins enforcement procedures to ensure that the failure is corrected.

Land Use referrals: Boulder County Land Use regulations require that each occupied dwelling have an approved septic system before a building permit can be issued. BCPH receives referrals from the Boulder County Land Use Department in response to applications from homeowners who wish to make changes to their properties. If BCPH identifies an unapproved septic system through a referral, the property owner is required to upgrade the septic system.

Property transfer regulation: After researching nationally how the issue of unapproved septic systems is being addressed, BCPH implemented the requirement of inspection of a property's septic systems at the time of property sale or transfer. The regulation also requires that a property have an approved septic system at the time of transfer, or that the new buyer will make the repairs within one year of the closing date.

Direct outreach to high-risk areas: Areas where septic systems have a greater chance for negatively impacting our water have been identified and prioritized by BCPH staff. Over a 15-year period, staff will provide property owners in these high-risk areas with information specific to their risk and options for bringing unapproved systems up to standard. This will include community discussion about next steps in addressing the unapproved septic systems in the specific area.

Community identified solutions: The Boulder County community possesses vast knowledge and expertise. Through open houses, surveys, and direct communication with the community, staff anticipates that additional strategies will be identified to address the issue of unapproved septic systems.

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