



FACT SHEET

ALTERNATIVE WASTEWATER (SEPTIC) SYSTEMS

GENERAL PLAN UPDATE INFORMATION

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BACKGROUND

Several comments have been received on the General Plan Update related to alternative onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS). Most recommend that the General Plan Update support their use suggesting that alternative OWTS would allow for clustered development. As discussed below, the draft General Plan Update does contain a supporting policy. However, there seems to be a misunderstanding about alternative OWTS and what they can actually accommodate. This issue is also clarified in this Fact Sheet. Additionally, currently the County Department of Environmental Health only has permitting authority over conventional OWTS. Alternative OWTS currently fall under the jurisdiction of the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB).

DRAFT GENERAL PLAN UPDATE POLICY

The draft General Plan Update Policy LU-14.5 states, “**Alternate Sewage Disposal Systems.** Support the use of alternative on-site sewage disposal systems when conventional systems are not feasible and in conformance with State guidelines and regulations.”

WHAT ARE ALTERNATIVE ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS (OWTS)?

Alternative OWTS are individual OWTS using advanced treatment beyond the primary treatment that occurs in a septic tank and generally only serve a single property. One of the misconceptions about alternative onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) is that they can be used to make lots significantly smaller. Although in some cases, an alternative OWTS will take less land area than a conventional OWTS, their use came about due to the need to deal with issues of shallow soil, shallow groundwater, or water quality issues which prevented the use of conventional OWTS. Increased density with development using OWTS will increase the issues with degradation of water quality which potentially could be overcome through the use of alternative OWTS but it doesn't change the amount of land area needed for disposal.

COMMUNITY SYSTEMS

Clustered or community systems are sewage treatment systems that collect the wastewater flows from multiple dwellings/lots and treat and dispose of the sewage in a common disposal field or area.

These systems may consist of individual or common septic tanks discharging to a conventional disposal field or may utilize advanced treatment systems or package treatment plants. All clustered or community systems fall under the jurisdiction of the RWQCB.

USE OF ALTERNATIVE ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS (OWTS) TO CREATE NEW LEGAL LOTS

The use of alternative systems to create new lots would require a modification of the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) Basin Plan since their use to create new lots is currently prohibited (please see Chapter 4 pages 30-31 of the Basin Plan). The State Water Resources Control Board, per AB885 regulations, is currently developing statewide OWTS regulations that include requirements for both conventional and alternative OWTS. The RWQCB is obligated under State law to make these Basin Plan amendments when the new statewide OWTS regulations are put in place. The County will modify existing ordinances to accommodate the new state wide requirements in addition to any requirements that the RWQCB may have.

USE OF ALTERNATIVE ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS FOR EXISTING LEGAL LOTS

The use of alternative systems in San Diego County to develop existing legal lots would require a modification of the County's ordinance since they are currently not approved for use other than in the Valley Center and S. Citrus Avenue moratorium areas. Concurrence from the RWQCB is also required.

The County has not made a change for existing lots because the State is still developing new regulations for the use of alternative systems to be enforced statewide. Any changes to the County ordinance to allow alternative systems for existing legal lots may be in conflict with what the statewide regulations require and put an undue burden on project proponents or existing alternative systems owners. The County is committed to make all necessary Ordinance changes once the statewide regulations are finalized.

County of San Diego - General Plan Update

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The County of San Diego's Onsite Wastewater System Ordinance can be found in Title 6, Division 8, Chapter 3 of the San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinance:

[http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/sandregs/title6healthandsanitation*/division8sewageandrefusedisposal/chapter3septictanksandseepagepits*?fn=altmain-nf.htm\\$f=templates\\$3.0](http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/sandregs/title6healthandsanitation*/division8sewageandrefusedisposal/chapter3septictanksandseepagepits*?fn=altmain-nf.htm$f=templates$3.0)

The San Diego RWQCB Basin Plan is available at:

http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb9/water_issues/programs/basin_plan/index.shtml.

The requirements for Community Sewerage Systems can be found in Chapter 4 starting on Page 4-29. The contact person at the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board for community (clustered) sewage systems is Bob Morris and he can be reached at (858) 467-2962.