



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND QUALITY
LAND AND WATER QUALITY DIVISION

**ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT (ADU)
Frequently Asked Questions**

For properties served by Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS)

Is it feasible to construct an ADU on my property?

Feasibility is determined by obtaining DEHQ approval of an OWTS Layout Application. The first step is to contact an OWTS Professional who will prepare and submit the application after selecting the best OWTS design to match your ADU proposal and specific site conditions. DEHQ will perform a field inspection of the submitted application, and if all requirements are met will provide terms of approval.

What information must be included in the OWTS Layout Application?

A checklist of requirements is available at www.sandiegocounty.gov/deh/septic. The site plan and supporting information must demonstrate that the existing residence and the ADU will be served by an OWTS that complies with current standards for location, size, and design and that 100% reserve area is delineated to allow future OWTS replacement.

Can an ADU be connected to my existing OWTS?

An ADU is a second dwelling regardless if attached or detached, and in almost every case, an ADU addition would exceed the maximum capacity of the existing septic tank and disposal area. Conceivably, an ADU could be connected to an existing septic tank, if adequately sized, and there may be options for expanding the existing disposal area.

How is the size of a septic tank determined?

Septic tank size is based on the number of bedrooms and calculated separately for each dwelling. Typically, each dwelling requires an individual septic tank, but to increase the opportunity to utilize existing septic tanks the minimum size requirements have been altered for the ADU scenarios outlined in the table below.

Main Dwelling	Second Dwelling	Minimum Tank Size
1 BR	1 BR	1000 Gallons
2 BR	1 BR	1200 Gallons
2 BR	2 BR	1500 Gallons
3 BR	1 BR	1500 Gallons
3 BR	2 BR	1500 Gallons
4 BR	1 BR	1500 Gallons

How is the type and size of a disposal system determined?

Soil permeability, soil depth, bedroom count, and available area, determine the disposal system type and size. OWTS Professionals perform percolation testing to evaluate soil permeability. They also perform soil borings to ensure soil is deep enough to meet minimum separation requirements between the depth of wastewater infiltration and groundwater and/or shallow bedrock. The number of bedrooms has an established wastewater design volume, and the available area depends on meeting required setbacks to items that could be both on and off the property.

Is percolation testing required?

Percolation testing is critical for sizing disposal areas accurately because soil permeability and depth of soil can vary significantly throughout a property, especially property with existing development. All Layout Applications must include data from percolation testing performed in the location of all proposed disposal areas and reserve areas. DEHQ will only consider the acceptance of existing percolation test in the following circumstances:

- 1.) DEHQ approved percolation test data from a previous Layout Application record demonstrated to be in the location of the proposed OWTS that is of similar design.
- 2.) Percolation test data used as the basis for a Health Department Certification recorded on a parcel map or plat demonstrated to be in the location of the proposed OWTS that is of similar design.

Is there an advantage to a shared OWTS vs. a separate OWTS for an ADU?

An OWTS Professional will evaluate your existing and proposed development, soil conditions, and site constraints, and discuss design options that could include many other unique variables such as, age and condition of the existing OWTS, cost of OWTS installation and operation, existing easements, grading impacts, ADU access driveway, stormwater management, fire authority requirements, desired future development (pools, decks, sheds, solar, etc.), and mature landscape removal.

When is the OWTS Installation Permit issued?

OWTS Installation Permits can be issued when all terms of an approved OWTS Layout Application are satisfied. These terms vary, but typical examples include: DEHQ review of, building plans, grading plans, pump designs, well water test results, and DEHQ field inspection of grading. DEHQ Layout Approval expires after 1 year.

Should I wait to submit a Building Permit Application until after I obtain DEHQ approval of my OWTS Layout Application?

Yes, because it may not be possible to obtain DEHQ approval for your ADU proposal or the OWTS required by DEHQ may be much more expensive than you initially expected. Applicants that submit a Building Permit Application without first obtaining DEHQ Layout approval are subject to incurring significant costs and wait times that are avoidable. Building Permit Application site plans without well and OWTS locations will be rejected by Planning and Development Services (PDS).

Where can I find the regulatory requirements for OWTS in San Diego County?

The County of San Diego Local Agency Management Program (LAMP) is available at www.sandiegocounty.gov/deh/septic and contains the minimum regulatory requirements for OWTS siting, design, and installation.

What other pro-active steps can I take as the homeowner?

Visit the DEHQ website at www.sandiegocounty.gov/deh/septic and find the lists of: OWTS Professionals, Septic Contractors, and Septic Pumps.

Find the As-Built of your existing OWTS using the DEHQ document library at <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/deh/doclibrary>.

Use lwq-duty.deh@sdcounty.ca.gov for all correspondence and document submittals.