



TINY HOMES ON WHEELS (THOW) Frequently Asked Questions For Properties Served by Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS)

Can I construct a THOW on my property if I have an OWTS?

The first step is to contact an OWTS Qualified Professional ([Qualified Professional List](#)) who will evaluate conditions on your parcel to determine if an OWTS design is suitable for a THOW. The Qualified Professional will prepare and submit an OWTS Layout Report to DEHQ for review. If the project meets all [Local Agency Management Program](#) (LAMP) requirements, the Layout Report will be approved.

What requirements should I be aware of?

DEHQ must consider the density of OWTS in the area, as more OWTS can contribute to groundwater impairment. If a THOW is proposed on a vacant parcel, density limits are not applicable. When a THOW is proposed as a secondary dwelling, density requirements allow for a combined total of 6 bedrooms to be served by a conventional OWTS or 10 bedrooms to be served by an OWTS with supplemental treatment. In some cases, the acreage of the property can allow for increased density.

Can a THOW be connected to my existing OWTS?

Depending on several factors, including the location and capacity of the existing OWTS and reserve area, a THOW may be able to connect to the existing OWTS. However, in most cases, a THOW will exceed the approved maximum capacity of the existing OWTS, requiring expansion or a new OWTS.

How is the size of a septic tank determined?

Septic tank size is based on the number of bedrooms and is shown in the table below. The number of bedrooms is determined by available sleeping areas with the expectation of 2 people per bedroom.

Primary Dwelling	Second Dwelling	Minimum Tank Size
1 Bedroom	1 Bedroom	1000 Gallons
2 Bedrooms	1 Bedroom	1200 Gallons
2 Bedrooms	2 Bedrooms	1500 Gallons
3 Bedrooms	1 Bedrooms	1500 Gallons
3 Bedrooms	2 Bedrooms	1500 Gallons
4 Bedrooms	1 Bedrooms	1500 Gallons
4 Bedrooms	2 Bedrooms	2000 Gallons

How is the type and size of a subsurface dispersal system determined?

Soil permeability, soil depth, bedroom count, and available area are used to determine the subsurface dispersal system type and size. OWTS Professionals may perform percolation testing to evaluate soil permeability. They also install soil borings to ensure soil is deep enough to meet minimum separation requirements between the bottom of the dispersal field and groundwater and/or shallow bedrock. The system must meet required setbacks to features, like structures, water wells and streams, that could be both on and off the property.

Is percolation testing required?

Percolation testing is critical for sizing dispersal areas accurately because soil permeability and depth of soil can vary significantly throughout a property. All OWTS Layout Reports must include data from percolation testing performed in the location of all proposed dispersal areas and reserve areas. DEHQ will consider existing percolation test data from a previous OWTS Layout Report that is in the location of the proposed OWTS and is of similar design.

When is the OWTS Installation Permit issued?

An OWTS Installation Permit can be issued after the OWTS Layout Report has been approved and any associated terms of approval have been 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. The OWTS Layout Report approval expires after two years, and the installation permit should be obtained before this approval expires. An OWTS Installation Permit expires after one year.

What is the recommended order to submit a DEHQ Layout Report and PDS Building Permit Application?

DEHQ strongly recommends obtaining DEHQ layout approval prior to submitting a building permit application. It may be determined through the layout review process that a THOW is not feasible due to site constraints or is cost prohibitive due to the type of OWTS required.

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 this link: [Final 2025 LAMP](#) and contains the minimum regulatory requirements for OWTS siting, design, and installation.

Can I be approved for an “off-grid” THOW?

All dwellings, including THOWs, must demonstrate a potable water source and an approved means of wastewater disposal as being available. Trucked or hauled water is not considered an approved source of potable water for purposes of any new construction. A water meter from a water purveyor or a domestic well are the only approved potable water sources. Composting toilets, holding tanks (above or below ground), and portable toilets are not an approved means of wastewater disposal for THOWs.

What other proactive steps can I take as the homeowner?

You can visit the DEHQ website at www.sandiegocounty.gov/deh/septic and find the lists of OWTS Professionals, Septic Contractors, and Septic Pumpers. You can also find information on your existing OWTS using the DEHQ document library at <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/deh/doclibrary>. Questions should be emailed to LWQDduty@sdcounty.ca.gov.

It is strongly recommended that you do not complete the purchase of a THOW or the land on which you hope to place the THOW without first obtaining DEHQ approval for your proposed development and having discussed the project in detail with Planning and Development Services (PDS). Not all properties can support development, based on the use of an OWTS and not all properties can obtain permits for a potable water well.