

## Septic System FAQs

1. Do I need a permit to install a septic tank even though I live out in the county?  
Answer: Yes, septic systems are only allowed to be installed out in the county where city sewers are not constructed and are required to be permitted by the Ector County Health Department.
2. What is the cost for a permit?  
Answer: The Ector County Health Department charges a non-refundable \$250 application review fee for residential permits and \$450 for commercial permits.
3. Can I have a septic system installed on a small lot? I have heard that they are only allowed on lot sizes of  $\geq 0.5$  acres with a public water supply connection and  $\geq 1$  acre with a water well.  
Answer: Texas Administrative Code 285.4(b)(1), allows for the approval of septic systems on existing small lots or tracts of land if they were last subdivided before January 1, 1988 and they can meet the setback requirements (drainfield 100 feet from any water well, 5 feet from structures and property lines)
4. Can I connect 1 or more recreational vehicles or another mobile home to my existing septic system?  
Answer: Your original septic system was designed for the size of your existing residence, either based on number of bedrooms or liveable square footage of the residence. Unless your original septic system was over-designed, you are not allowed to connect additional residences, as this would be in violation of Texas Administrative Code 285.2(2) to Alter – To change a septic system resulting in an increase in the volume of the permitted flow.
5. Can I install my own septic system?  
Answer: State law allows for homeowners to install their own septic system for their primary residence only. For any rental properties, you would be required to hire a licensed installer.
6. How big of a septic tank do I need?  
Answer: The smallest 2-compartment septic tank that the state allows is a 750 gallon tank. For a 1 or 2 bedroom residence, a minimum 750 gallon tank is required. A minimum 1,000 gallon tank is needed for a 3 bedroom structure and 1,250 gallon for a 4 bedroom residence. Keep in mind these are minimum tank sizes. Both the state of Texas and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommend that larger tank sizes be installed. They have historical information that shows if you have a larger septic tank, it prolongs the life of your drainfield.
7. Do I need a Site Evaluation, even if I am going to install a septic tank myself?  
Answer: Yes, a Site Evaluation is always required to be performed by a licensed Site Evaluator. The purpose of the Site Evaluation is to provide information to the installer (or homeowner), regarding the type of soil present in the disposal area (drainfield). If the disposal area is too rocky, a soil substitution drainfield or other method for fluid waste disposal may be required. Other

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methods might include an aerobic treatment unit and surface application, Evapo-Transpiration drainfields, a pumped effluent drainfield, drip irrigation drainfield, low pressure dose drainfield or construction of a mound. Many of these require professional designs.

8. What is caliche? I have heard that it may cost a lot of money to have a septic system installed on a property with hard caliche.

Answer: The shallow soil in West Texas is extremely variable in nature. Generally, a thin layer of sandy loam is present at ground surface, extending to a depth of 6 inches to more than 6 feet, but typically, no more than 3 feet. Beneath this soil layer, calcified soil is present. This material can extend to a depth of 35 feet. This calcified soil, often termed “caliche” is composed of calcium carbonate and can cement together other materials, including gravel, sand, clay and silt. The degree of cementation determines the hardness of the caliche. This means either the septic system will be easy to install, if the caliche is poorly cemented (soft and crumbly) or extremely difficult to install if well cemented (rock-like). A soil substitution drainfield may be required or possibly an aerobic treatment unit and spray field, if the soil is well cemented.

9. What do I need to turn in besides the septic application?

Answer: In addition to the 2 page septic application, planning materials that are required to be submitted to the Ector County Health Department include, the owner/ installer signed Development Permit Exemption Certificate, issued by Ector County Engineering (this verifies the property is not within the regulated Floodplain), the Site Evaluation, design calculations and a scaled drawing.

10. How do I find a septic installer?

Answer: The Ector County Health Department maintains a list of state licensed installers, site evaluators and designers. This list can be found on our website or a hard copy obtained at the health department. We cannot make any representation as to the reputableness or quality of work provided by these individuals. We would recommend that you get references, work under a written contract and request they provide you with a copy of their license. The contract should include a fixed scope of work, a fixed fee and time when the work will be completed. The installer’s workload can affect how quickly they can complete your project. Please contact us if you have been provided a quote, but the contractor cannot provide you proof that he/ she is state licensed and wants payment up front. We can check our records and let you know if they are state licensed.

11. How long does it take to get a septic permit?

Answer: A permit is issued by the Ector County Health Department, following completion of a successful inspection. The step-by-step process includes submitting the application and all of the planning materials to the Ector

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County Health Department. We will review the application for completeness and compliance with state law. If everything is in order, we will issue an Authorization to Construct (ATC) the septic system. When the septic system has been constructed, the installer or homeowner should contact the Ector County Health Department for a final inspection. When it passes the final inspection, we will issue a Permit and License to Operate the septic system. Delays in submitting all of the proper planning materials cause delays in the review process. When we receive all of the planning materials and the design is acceptable, we can usually issue an ATC within 5 business days, sometimes sooner. The schedule is dependent on our workloads at time of submittal.

12. Can I discharge my graywater, from my shower/bath tub onto the ground?

Answer: The state's septic rules ([Texas Administrative Code Chapter 285](#)) were modified in 2005, and, so the answer is 2 parts. For those single family residences that were discharging graywater, prior to 2005, state law allows them to continue, as long as the discharge is not ponding and creating a nuisance. If the residence is not that old, the owner is required to include that wastewater into the design of the septic system. The state still allows for graywater discharge, but it has to include a dosing tank and connection to the septic system, so when the ground gets wet from rainfall (yes, it rains once in a while), the graywater gets directed into the septic system.