

Monterey County Health Department Environmental Health Bureau

1270 Natividad Road, Salinas, CA 93906 (831) 755-4505



Tenant Improvement or Change of Use at a Commercial Facility Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS, also called septic systems)

OWTS can provide an effective, reliable means of sewage disposal for properties that are unable to connect to a regional sewer system when sited and designed appropriately. However, their use presents several limitations that preclude unfettered expansion of commercial operations. This informational guide is intended to identify commonly encountered limitations but may not address all site-specific concerns for a particular property. The Monterey County Health Department, Environmental Health Bureau, will review permit applications based on the regulations and policies in place at the time of permit approval. Food facility equipment and domestic water supply requirements can also be impacted by a tenant improvement or change of use, but are not addressed by this document.

Definition of Terms

Local Agency Management Program for Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems in Monterey County (LAMP) means the regulatory document adopted by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, effective May 11, 2018, that supplements Monterey County Code (MCC), Chapter 15.20, Sewage Disposal.

Conforming dispersal system means an existing dispersal system that meets all water-related horizontal and vertical setback requirements, pursuant to Table 5-8 of the Monterey County LAMP, is not covered by an impermeable surface, and a total depth of ten (10) feet or less.

Oil/Grease interceptor means a passive interceptor that has a rate of flow exceeding fifty (50) gallons-per-minute and that is located outside a building. Oil/grease interceptors are used for separating and collecting oil and grease from wastewater and are required for new commercial food-service operations (restaurants) or change of ownership of an existing food-service operation.

Nitrogen loading limit means the maximum mass of Total Nitrogen, measured in grams, allowed in wastewater that is or will be discharged into the ground through an OWTS during a specified period of time.

Limiting Factors for Consideration

Volume of Wastewater – The volume of wastewater anticipated from a proposed use may be estimated using the Quantities of Sewage Flow from Table C of MCC, Chapter 15.20. Wastewater volume from existing uses may be estimated using the same table, or in consideration of data obtained from water use records or a meter installed on a pressurized wastewater effluent line.

Existing OWTS Capacity – Was the existing OWTS designed to accept the volume of wastewater that will be generated from existing and proposed uses that are connected to the system? OWTS are designed to accept the maximum volume of wastewater (peak days, not average) from the use(s).

Existing OWTS Conformance with Current OWTS Standards – The Monterey County LAMP specifies that non-conforming dispersal systems shall not be allowed to increase wastewater volume or strength unless supplemental treatment is incorporated into the OWTS and horizontal and vertical setback requirements will be met.

Nitrogen Loading – Parcels served by OWTS are restricted to 40g of nitrogen from OWTS disposal per acre of land per day; this is equivalent to approximately 300 gallons of household domestic wastewater and approximately 150 gallons of high strength wastewater (commercial operations). Wastewater from commercial operations, including restaurants, can vary widely based on the extent of the operation and individual uses. Sampling of the wastewater stream, or empirical data from a comparable, existing operation, may be necessary to calculate the volume of wastewater that can be discharged on the site, and in consideration of the property's acreage.

Request a copy of EHB records for a particular property on the EHB website:

<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/health/environmental-health/general/public-records-request>