

How will the Proposed Bernalillo County Wastewater Ordinance Affect Existing Residential Lots?

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- 1. Functioning Wastewater Systems**
- 2. Modified Wastewater Systems**
- 3. New Wastewater Systems**

Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department
600 2nd Street NW, Suite 500
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Phone: 924-3650
Fax: 924-3684
email: eh@bernco.gov

Bernalillo County Wastewater Ordinance

Background

Groundwater is the main drinking water source for residents of Bernalillo County. Unfortunately, widespread groundwater contamination exists in Bernalillo County, and many public and private wells have been affected. Where the groundwater table is close to the surface and most vulnerable, groundwater contamination already exists. It has also been detected in areas where the depth to groundwater is several hundred feet below the surface of the land. The East Mountain Area is also beginning to show signs of groundwater contamination. Septic tank effluent has been identified as one of the sources of this contamination, and this contamination will continue until wastewater systems provide better treatment of sewage. Once groundwater is contaminated, cleanup can be either enormously expensive or, in some cases, impractical.

With the knowledge that something needs to be done to protect Bernalillo County's main source of drinking water, the Bernalillo County Commission adopted the Ground-Water Protection Policy and Action Plan (GPPAP). The Ground-Water Protection Policy and Action Plan describes what needs to be done to protect this vital natural resource.

GPPAP recommendations associated with the treatment of sewage were:

- Development of performance standards for wastewater systems.
- Limiting the contaminant discharge from wastewater systems.
- Requiring better treatment of sewage in new subdivisions.
- Development of a certification program.
- Development of operating and maintenance requirements for wastewater systems.

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is also in the process of developing a new wastewater regulation entitled the New Mexico Liquid Waste Disposal Regulations. Because these are state regulations, Bernalillo County must enforce any provisions in the New Mexico Liquid Waste Disposal Regulations that are stricter than those written in the Bernalillo County Wastewater Ordinance. Though the proposed regulations developed by the New Mexico Environment Department are similar to the ones developed by Bernalillo County, there are some differences. A draft of the New Mexico Liquid Waste Disposal Regulations can be seen at www.nmenv.state.nm.us, the New Mexico Environment Department's web site. If you have questions concerning the proposed New Mexico Liquid Waste Disposal Regulations, please call the New Mexico Environment Department at (505) 841-9450.

How will the Proposed Bernalillo County Wastewater Ordinance Affect Residential Wastewater Systems?

Below are some questions and answers that explain how the proposed Bernalillo County Wastewater Ordinance would affect wastewater systems serving residences.

Sewer

Do I have to connect to the sewer line?

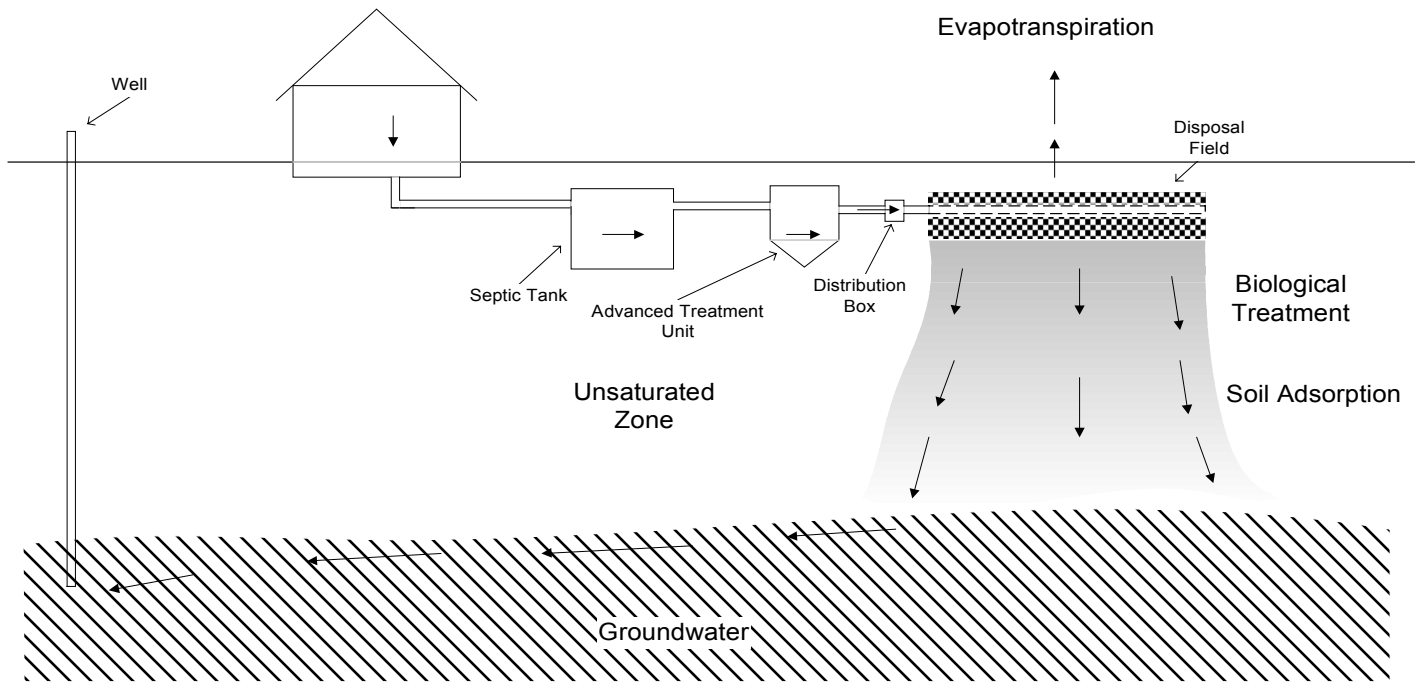
If sewer is available, your wastewater system must be abandoned and your home, as well as any other structures that generate sewage, must be connected to the sewer line. There will be one exception to this; if the existing wastewater system can meet the performance standards required by the proposed ordinance, the property will not need to connect to the sewer line.

How do I find out if sewer is available?

Available means there is a sewer line within 200 feet of your property and accessed via rights-of-way or easements. To determine if there is a public sewer line that abuts your property contact the City of Albuquerque Customer Service Division at 768-2840. To determine if a sewer line is within 200 feet of your property, contact the Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department at 924-3650 and ask to speak to the Environmental Engineer.

When will I have to connect to the sewer line?

Within one (1) year from the date sewer becomes available, your property will need to be connected to a sewer line. Any property sold after the effective date of the ordinance must connect within 30 days of the property changing ownership. The current wastewater ordinance requires that homes connect as soon as sewer is available. This means that those homes that currently have sewer available should have already connected.



Onsite Wastewater System

Clara Cates, PE, Environmental Engineer
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Wastewater Systems

If the County Commission adopts the ordinance, when would the new provisions of the ordinance concerning wastewater systems have to be met?

If your system is working as it was intended to work, your existing wastewater system is considered a functioning system. If the system continues to function properly, these new provisions will not affect you until January 1, 2015.

If your system is not functioning as it should, it may need to be modified. Modifications of a wastewater system include:

- changing the method of wastewater treatment or disposal;
- expanding the wastewater system;
- altering the horizontal or vertical location of the wastewater system;
- removing or replace component materials in a disposal system;
- increasing the design flow; or

- changing the size or boundaries of a lot so that the total flow for the lot exceeds the total flow limitations in the ordinance.

A modification does not include servicing or replacing mechanical or electrical parts of an approved wastewater system with like kind parts; pumping of septage from a system; or making minor structural corrections to a tank or distribution box.

In order to better protect groundwater resources, after the ordinance goes into effect the complete wastewater system will need to meet all the requirements of the proposed ordinance when a system is modified. If this is not possible, the homeowner may submit a request for a variance. Depending on site conditions, lot size, the type of wastewater system, and the number of bedrooms in your home, you may or may not be required to add an advanced treatment unit. An advanced treatment unit provides additional treatment of the sewage. Prior to modifying the wastewater system, a wastewater application, with all supporting documents, must be submitted to the Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department (BCEHD). Prior to using the wastewater system an operating permit will need to be obtained.

If your wastewater system is a new system that was permitted after the ordinance's effective date, the system will need to meet the requirements of the proposed ordinance.

What are the new provisions of the ordinance concerning wastewater systems?

Operating Permit

Prior to the wastewater system being used, the homeowner must obtain an operating permit. If the operating permit is for a new wastewater system or a system that has just been modified, the wastewater application also serves as the application for an operating permit. The operating permit expires when the ownership of the property changes. When ownership changes, the new owners must submit an operating application for their operating permit.

The operating permit for a new or modified system will be issued after the final inspection has been performed, information about the wastewater system has been provided to the homeowner, and the homeowner has agreed to have the system regularly inspected and maintained. Information provided will include such items as:

- the type of system installed;
- procedure to follow if an alarm goes off;
- a general overview of how the system functions;
- do's and don'ts for the system; and
- how often the system should be inspected.

An operating permit will be issued to the new owner of the property after the new owner has submitted a system evaluator's report to Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department for review, and the department has determined that the wastewater system still complies with the ordinance.

There is no charge for an operating permit.

How often does a new or modified wastewater system need a maintenance inspection?

The frequency of maintenance inspections depends on the type of wastewater system installed and will be established during the wastewater application review process.

Who can perform these maintenance inspections?

If the wastewater system is a septic tank which gravity drains to a disposal field, the septage hauler can inspect the system. The septage hauler should inspect the system each time he pumps the septic tank.

For all other systems, the homeowner must contract with a maintenance person who will inspect and maintain the system, and this maintenance contract must be in place at all times. The current fees charged by maintenance persons are around \$10 per month.

How often should the tank be pumped?

The "Estimated Septic Pumping Frequencies in Years" table below provides recommendations. For example, a 1,000 gallon septic tank, which is used by two people, should be pumped every 5.9 years. If there are eight people using a 1,000 gallon septic tank, the septic tank should be pumped every year.

It is also a good idea to have the tank pumped just before a large gathering of people is expected.

Regularly pumping the septic tank will extend the life of your wastewater system and protect your disposal field.

Estimated Septic Pumping Frequencies in Years*

Household Size (Number of People)

Tank Size Gals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1000	12.4 yr.	5.9 yr.	3.7 yr.	2.6 yr.	2.0 yr.	1.5 yr.	1.2 yr.	1.0 yr.	0.8 yr.	0.7 yr.
1250	15.6 yr.	7.5 yr.	4.8 yr.	3.4 yr.	2.6 yr.	2.0 yr.	1.7 yr.	1.4 yr.	1.2 yr.	1.0 yr.
1500	18.9 yr.	9.1 yr.	5.9 yr.	4.2 yr.	3.3 yr.	2.6 yr.	2.1 yr.	1.8 yr.	1.5 yr.	1.3 yr.
1750	22.1 yr.	10.7 yr.	6.9 yr.	5.0 yr.	3.9 yr.	3.1 yr.	2.6 yr.	2.2 yr.	1.9 yr.	1.6 yr.
2000	25.4 yr.	12.4 yr.	8.0 yr.	5.9 yr.	4.5 yr.	3.7 yr.	3.1 yr.	2.6 yr.	2.2 yr.	2.0 yr.
2250	28.6 yr.	14.0 yr.	9.1 yr.	6.7 yr.	5.2 yr.	4.2 yr.	3.5 yr.	3.0 yr.	2.6 yr.	2.3 yr.
2500	31.9 yr.	15.6 yr.	10.2 yr.	7.5 yr.	5.9 yr.	4.8 yr.	4.0 yr.	4.0 yr.	3.0 yr.	2.6 yr.

*Karen Mancl, Ohio State University Extension

Effluent Filter

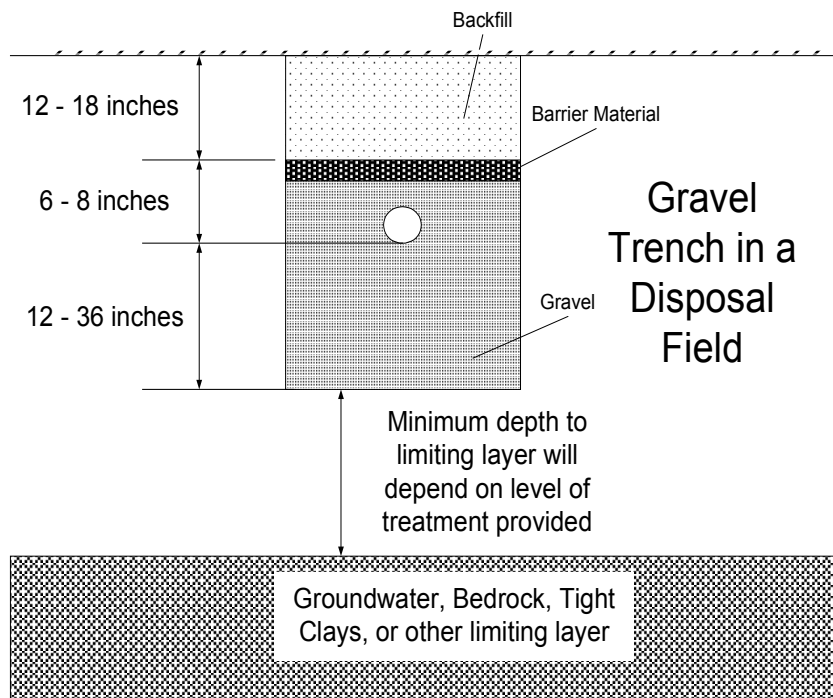
The proposed ordinance will require that all systems have an effluent filter in the second chamber of the septic tank. The effluent filter prevents large particles from entering the disposal field, thereby extending the life of the disposal field. The effluent filter should be cleaned periodically, depending on the use of the wastewater system and the recommendations of the manufacturer. It is normally cleaned every time the septic tank is pumped. The current cost of an effluent filter is around \$100.

Lot Size and Total Flow

Generally, the smaller your lot, the more treatment sewage requires. The current ordinance limits the number of bedrooms a house can have. The proposed ordinance allows more bedrooms, if better treatment is provided.

Depth to Limiting Layer

If better treatment of sewage is provided, the proposed ordinance will allow the distance between the bottom of the disposal field and the limiting layer to be reduced from four feet, distance required by the current ordinance, to two feet.



Performance Standards

In Bernalillo County there exist many variations in soil and hydrogeological conditions. This means each site's soil and hydrogeological conditions are reviewed on a site-by-site basis. The current ordinance requires that an advanced system be used if site conditions are such that a septic system should not be used, but does not clearly specify the level of treatment the advanced

system needs to provide. The proposed ordinance specifies the level of treatment that needs to be provided.

The performance standards noted in the proposed ordinance should be met prior to sewage entering the disposal field, though there are a few advanced treatment units that do both treatment and disposal in one unit. These units will be required to meet performance standards prior to sewage entering the soil.

If an existing wastewater system is required to provide better treatment of the sewage, an advanced treatment unit, which currently costs around \$3,000, may need to be added the system. The current cost of installing these advanced treatment units in the East Mountain Area is around \$4,000.

Fees

	Proposed Ordinance			
Residential Use	Wastewater Application	Wastewater Permit	Operating Permit	Total Fee
Modification	\$75	\$75	No Fee	\$150
New Installation	\$75	\$75	No Fee	\$150

	Current Ordinance	
Residential Use	Wastewater Application and Wastewater Permit	Total Fee
Modification	\$30	\$30
New Installation	\$50	\$50

Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department Wastewater Permit Process

