

Long County Environmental Health

Guide to Successful Development and the Local Health Department

(Note: This Document serves to provide an overview of programmatic requirements and to address only a few issues that have come to the department's attention. Detailed overviews can be found in the Environmental Health Rules and Regulations. Visit: www.gachd.org/environmental-health/)

1. I am planning to develop a tract of land into a subdivision. What are the health department's requirements?

It is highly recommended that a "pre-development" review be considered **prior to any development improvements**. At this point in the process, the health department can discuss and make recommendations related to next steps. A pre-development review requires a boundary plat including:

- A vicinity map;
- A topographic map; and
- A preliminary soil study conducted in compliance with the Department's current Manual for On-Site Sewage Management Systems (This document is available at <http://www.gachd.org/environmental-health/>)

The following **is required for subdivision proposals and for final approval** of the subdivision by the health department:

(a.) A boundary plat drawn to a reasonable scale which includes:

1. A vicinity map;
2. Proposed lots and streets including lot identification, dimensions, building lines and square footage of lots;
3. A topographic map depicted in two foot (2') contour intervals. Lesser contour intervals may be approved by the health department if the slope is sufficiently steep;

4. A soil map and soil descriptions based on a high intensity soil study (Level III) conducted in compliance with the Department's current Manual for On-site Sewage Management Systems;
5. The location of all present and proposed wells, water systems, water courses, flood plains, sewage systems, structures, right-of-ways, utilities, storm water drainage systems and easements on the property and within one hundred feet (100') outside the perimeter of the property; and
6. The name, registration number and seal of the professional surveyor or engineer who prepared the development plan.

(b.) A completed Subdivision Analysis Record on forms provided by the health department (copy attached)

(c.) A copy of the following documents issued by the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR):

- The land disturbance activity permit issued by either the EPD or the local "Issuing Authority". For the purposes of this section, "Issuing Authority" means the governing authority of any county or municipality, which is certified pursuant to subsection (a) of Code Section 12-7-8 by the director of the EPD.
- A letter of approval to begin construction of a public water supply system and approving the source of the water supply where public water is to be utilized; and
- For a development, which will result in the disturbance of more than five (5) acres, a copy of the Notice of Intent (NOI) submitted to the EPD to be covered under NPDES Permit GAR100000 for the discharge of storm water associated with construction activity.

APPROVAL REQUIRED

No person may sell, offer for sale, lease, rent, begin construction or otherwise begin the physical development of a lot or lots in a subdivision (or mobile home park) until written approval of plans for water supply and sewage disposal has been obtained from the County Board of Health (or local health department). This approval constitutes general acceptance of all lots, except those lots excluded, for development with on-site sewage management systems. *Excluded lots may receive further consideration based on additional information.

- 2. I just picked up my septic permit from the health department and have some concerns about the permit. What do I do next?** If you have questions about your permit, you may call the local environmental health department to discuss and/or request a scheduled site visit with the environmentalist. Some concerns may warrant a coordinated meeting between the developer, builder, septic installer, environmentalist and other interested parties.
- 3. I own a piece of property and would like to subdivide if for sale or to give to my heir(s). What do I do next?** Before you subdivide the property, you will need to consult with the local health environmental health department to determine if your plans to subdivide the property will be appropriate to support a septic system and/or a well. The regulations require one acre of usable land if you will wish to have a well and septic tank on the property and one half acre of usable land if your project will be supported by a public water system. A public water system is one that is approved and monitored by EPD. Consultation with a soil scientist may also be required if there is a problem with determining usable land area.
- 4. I have been told that I need a “perc” test from the local health department. What does that involve?** The term “perc” refers to a specialized soil test that can only be done by a certified soil scientist. When you apply for a septic permit, you are actually requiring that the environmentalist conduct what is called a lot evaluation. The environmentalist is required to be trained and to get a special certification by the state to conduct this work. The evaluation involves going into the field and boring a series of holes to examine the soil texture and expected “perc” (percolation) rate and to identify features of the soil that may cause problems if the septic system is installed. The environmentalist also makes notes in the field related to the property layout, drainage, location of wells, ditches or other considerations that may impact the installation of the septic system. After this evaluation, the environmentalist will take the data and write the permit. If there are problems, the property owner will be advised to consult with a soil scientist for a “Special Soil Study” (Level IV).
- 5. I would like to apply for a septic permit at the local health department. What information does the health department need from me?**

There is information that is critical for the evaluation of your lot for a septic system. Failure to provide the required information can delay the processing of your permit. The health department needs the following:

- A fee and a completed application (forms are available at the local environmental health office);
- Plans and specifications that show the location of the proposed septic system and a septic replacement area (example attached);
- The plans should note the location of water supplies (wells), utilities, trash pits, driveways, property lines, ponds or other considerations both on and off your property that may bear on the location of the proposed septic system.
- Plans and specifications -to scale and completed by an engineer or surveyor- may be required on small, tight fitting lots
- The local health department may request any additional information from you that will help them in writing the permit

6. I have been told that I need a Level IV soil evaluation before a septic permit can be written by the local health department. Why do I need to get this information? When the environmentalist looked at your property he or she found some issues that would not allow a permit to be written. The issues may have been, but not limited to, soil (examples: “gumbo” clay or “hardpan”) on the lot that may not be right for your septic system, wetlands or ponded water on the lot. This specialized report by the soil scientist will give us the information that we need to locate your system in the best location on your lot. Prior to hiring the soil scientist, you may request that the environmentalist meet you back on the site so he or she can show you the problems that were found. Please note that you may be required to wait a period of time as the environmentalist is busy working with other clients and be required to pay an additional fee for the re-evaluation. A list of soil scientists may be obtained from your local environmental health department or at this website: www.health.state.ga.us/pdfs/environmental/SoilClassifiersbyCompanyName.pdf

7. The local health department evaluated my lot for a septic system. I am told that I need a wetland delineation. Why?

Septic systems must be installed a minimum distance from a variety of areas. Most, like ponds, ditches, etc. are obvious. Others, like wetlands are not and will require the evaluation from a specially trained person in this field. This person will look at the site and mark the location of where the wetlands begin

and/or end. If the septic system is installed in the wetlands it will not work and you may be fined by the federal government. There are some soil scientists that can do this work; however, for a complete list of these specially trained people, consult the Savannah District Office of the Army Corp of Engineers at 912-652-5279.

8. Why is there a mound in my yard where the septic system is located?

Septic drainfield lines are required to be maintained two feet (2') from the water table. This requirement took effect around 2000. Prior to that date, the required separation was only one foot (1'). In areas with high water tables (close to the surface), the drainfield lines may need to be installed above ground, forming a mound. A pump is also added to the mounded systems to pump the liquid from the tank up into the mound. The environmental health department recommends that you seed or sod your mound to ensure that the septic tank soil does not wash away and expose your drainfield lines causing waste to flow into your yard or the neighbors. Also, do not drive equipment or vehicles or place storage units and similar items on top of the mound. It is ok to mow the mound as long as a tractor is not used.

9. My septic system is failing. What do I need to do to get it repaired?

To begin the repair process, you will need to fill out an application at the local environmental health department. The environmentalist will evaluate your lot and will ask you about your septic system. Sometimes, not always, a problem can be resolved after an investigation of your system. For example, the environmentalist may find that after meeting with you that your home has water leaks in the toilets or other water use devices. If the problem cannot be resolved this way, a lot evaluation will be conducted and a permit will be written for the repair. You will need to consult with a septic contractor to repair your system. A list of certified installers can be obtained from the local environmental health department.

10. I have plans to build a commercial building in an area that does not have a city sewer. How will the health department determine the size of the septic system needed at my building? Commercial buildings (or non-residential) are sized based on gallons per day per employee, seat, water use device, etc. of the building. A sewage flow schedule, found in Section J of the septic tank manual, will give the environmentalist the information to write the permit. It is very important when you fill out the application that you are specific in noting what you are planning to build. Please note that if your building produces sewage of more than 2,000 gallons per day that a engineered plan of the

system will be required (bearing the registration number and signature of a Registered Professional Engineer, certified and registered under the laws of the state of Georgia).

11. Are there health department requirements for opening a restaurant or a hotel? Yes. It is unlawful for any person to operate any type of food service operation or hotel without first obtaining a valid permit from the local environmental health department. An application must be filled out and plans and specifications received and reviewed by the environmentalist ten (10) days prior to any new construction or renovation of a restaurant and fourteen (14) days prior to the new construction or renovation of any hotel. The food rules have recently changed and there are several new requirements. There are also special requirements for septic systems for food and hotel businesses. Do not assume that because a facility was once a restaurant or a hotel that it meets the rules. Always consult with the environmental health department before you purchase or lease a property or buy equipment. Copies of the food or hotel rules can be obtained from the local environmental health department or by visiting the following website: www.gachd.org/environmental-health/

12. I would like to build a swimming pool in my backyard. Does the health department have requirements? Public and semi-public swimming pools are permitted and inspected by local environmental health department. A swimming pool at your private residence does not require our approval; however, if you have septic system, we strongly recommend that you call the local environmental health department so that they can conduct an “existing evaluation” to help you locate your septic system. Remember to call before you dig!

If you have any questions about this fact sheet or about environmental health requirements, please contact your local environmentalist at 912-545-2107, Extension 235. For additional resources and information about health department services, please visit the health department website: www.gachd.org

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