



IOWA COUNTY OFFICE OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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POWTS – FAQ -Private Sewage System Maintenance Program

What is a POWTS?

POWTS is an acronym for a Priate Onsite Wastewater Treatment System. A more widely used term is 'septic system.' It is intended to treat domestic wastewater. The most common onsite system used is a septic tank in combination with a traditional drain field. A properly designed, installed, and maintained system should operate for 20 to 40 years or more, treating wastewater to minimize the negative impact on groundwater, surface water, and human health.

What is the reason for the State laws regarding POWTS?

These state laws intend to protect the health and safety of Wisconsin residents and to protect the ground and surface waters of the state. It is important to make sure that wastewater or effluent from the septic system is being treated properly, and to identify septic systems when they are not functioning properly. If a failing septic system contaminates drinking water, it can affect many more people than just the owner of the septic system.

Where can I find the regulations regarding state laws on POWTS?

Wisconsin Department of Commerce, Wisconsin Administrative Code was revised in the year 2000. Comm. 83.54 addresses the maintenance requirements for all POWTS, indicating the type of maintenance that must be performed on these systems and who must perform it. State Statute 145.20(5) addresses the requirement that counties must inventory all septic systems (POWTS) in the county and have a maintenance program in place encompassing all of these systems.

Why am I being charged a fee?

In 2000 the State of Wisconsin changed the State plumbing code, which the County is required to administer. The changes require that all septic systems, regardless of age, must be inspected by a qualified individual at least once every three years. If the accumulated solids in the tank(s) occupy more than one-third of the tank volume, the tank contents must be pumped. Holding

tanks are septic systems that are serviced as needed, which can occur more frequently than once every three years. The County is required to compile a database of all septic systems located in the County and send notices to those owners due for inspection and pumping to make sure that it is completed and reported to the County once every three years. The State did not provide any money to the County to do this additional work, thus properties with septic systems are being charged to pay for the maintenance program.

How much is the fee?

The County Board has established a filing fee of \$20 and a late filing fee of \$30. These are fees that are due every 3 years.

What will be required of me as a property owner as a result of this program?

After this initial information goes out and the inventory is completed, the County will begin sending out parcel-specific information and pumping notices. The pumping notice will have questions on it that need to be answered, thus you will have to contact a licensed pumper, plumber or POWTS maintainer to come out to inspect your system and have it pumped, if necessary. Once the pumping form is completed, you need to return it to the zoning department within the allotted timeframe. Once your POWTS is entered into our system, you will receive pumping notices every three years reminding you that your system is due to be pumped.

What if my POWTS is old and may need replacing?

Iowa County has had a maintenance program for systems installed since 1980. If you have a system that was installed prior to 1980 and we have inadequate record on file of the system's characteristics, you may be required to have a licensed plumber determine exactly what you have for a system. If it is determined that the system is failing or is otherwise a threat to public health and safety, you will need to replace it under state law. You may also qualify for a state grant called the Wisconsin Fund that helps offset the cost of replacement.

What if I have my tanks pumped every year or every two years?

While pumping your septic tanks every three years is the requirement, many experts in the field will recommend a more frequent maintenance program depending upon the use of the system. If you do have your system serviced at a more frequent time interval, you may provide your pumper with a copy of the pumping form for them to fill out and return to the County; or you may provide the County with an invoice copy showing the date and location (address, property owner, etc.) of pumping. Based on the system characteristics and current level of use, Iowa County will determine if the latest pumping will be adequate. Regardless, Iowa County must continue to send pumping reminders every three years from the last date we have on record.