



St. Joseph County Health Department

“Promoting physical and mental health and facilitating the prevention of disease, injury, and disability for all St. Joseph County residents”

PROCESS FOR OBTAINING A RESIDENTIAL SEPTIC PERMIT

A permit from the Health Department must be obtained to install, replace, or repair a septic system. This is required to protect the property owner, our drinking water supplies, and public health.

The improper design or installation of a septic system can cause it to fail in less than one year and can cause contamination of our drinking water supplies. The Health Department follows a careful process to help ensure each new system is installed correctly. Priority is given to residences where the existing system has failed.

The following must be performed to obtain a permit for a residential property.

1. The property owner obtains a soil report from a certified soil scientist. Three complete soil borings from the area of the new septic system are required. The Health Department can provide a list of the soil scientists authorized to do work in St. Joseph County.
2. The owner submits soil reports, a permit application, and a non-refundable permit fee to the Health Department. The owner may authorize a septic installer to perform this task for them. **The Health Department accepts cash, Master Card or Visa, money orders, cashiers checks & business checks. Personal checks are not accepted. Permit fees are shown below.**
3. Health Department issues minimum design specifications for the system. The specifications will be sent to the person designated on the application.
4. The owner gives the specifications to licensed septic installers so they may design a system and provide the owner with a bid for the work. The Health Department recommends that everyone obtain at least two bids.
5. For new construction (homes not yet constructed) the area of the proposed septic system must be roped off with steel posts, rope, and signs according to the Health Department’s standard requirements prior to submitting the design. **If the site is not roped off, the application will be rejected.**
6. The contractor selected by the owner to install the system submits a design to the Health Department for review and approval. The designs must comply with State law, County code, and the specifications and drawing requirements issued by the Health Department.
7. Occasionally a contractor will identify a way to construct the system that is in compliance with State and County laws but differs from the specifications issued by the Health Department. If this occurs the contractor must submit a **Variance Request** with the proposed designs/drawings and the Health Department will consider the proposal.
8. The Health Department conducts a site inspection and reviews the designs. Deficient designs are returned to the contractor for revision. The revision of designs is the most common cause of lengthy delays in the process.
9. The Health Department prepares site-specific approval requirements, as necessary, and issues a permit.

10. The Contractor installs the system according to State and County laws and the requirements in the permit.
11. If a contractor encounters something in the field which prevents the system from being installed according to the requirements in the permit, the contractor immediately calls the Health Department and submits a **Variance Request** for Health Department approval.
12. No deviation from the permit is allowed unless approved in advance.
13. The contractor calls the Health Department 24 hours in advance of when the installation will be ready for an inspection. For certain types of systems, the Health Department will perform several inspections of the system at various stages of construction. **The contractor must contact the Health Department in advance if the system is not going to be ready for inspection at the time arranged.**
14. Upon a final inspection by the Health Department and a determination that it appears the system was installed according to all requirements, the Health Department approves the system and the owner may begin using the system.

The Health Department gives priority to residents with failed systems and to residents that have extenuating circumstances. The following are typical time frames for each major step in the process.

Property owner obtaining soil borings from a soil scientist:	Up to 10 days
Health Department issuing specifications after receipt of application:	Up to 5 days
Property owner obtaining estimates and a design from a septic installer:	Up to 10 days
Health Department issuing a permit after receipt of a complete design:	Up to 5 days
Installation of the system is dependent on weather and contractor availability.	

Permit application fees for residential construction are as follows:

Residential New Construction Installation	\$150
Residential Replacement Installation	\$150
Residential Repair	\$50

Please direct all inquiries to the Health Department's Environmental Section @ (574) 235-9721