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FACT SHEET 1 – SITE EVALUATIONS

Disclaimer: Fact sheets do not supersede applicable laws, regulations, policies or procedures implemented by the Division. This fact sheet is a public document and is provided for general information only. Each property and project may present its own circumstances that will be considered on a per-project basis. Specific questions can be submitted to the Division.

A Site Evaluation is a comprehensive process that consists of several methodical steps and is more than just a percolation test. Site evaluations consider topography, soils, geology, surface and subsurface drainage, available area, groundwater conditions, and neighboring property setbacks. Sufficient area must be implemented to support an on-site sewage disposal system (OSDS) and repair area(s).

Site Evaluations are required for the initial development of a property. The initial development of property includes the subdivision of land, building on vacant parcels created that do not have an established sewage reserve area, or establishing additional septic reserve areas in detached structures used as living space.¹

Site Evaluations are required for developed properties applying for septic repair or replacement that do not have a designated sewage disposal area.

Site Evaluations may be required if the property owner has plans for expansion or changing the use of the property, whether voluntarily or in accordance with a repair.

If the property's combined sewage flow is over 5,000 gallons per day (gpd), a regional consultant from the Maryland Department of Environment must also review the site.

Conditions from neighboring properties, including the locations of wells, septic areas, septic permits, and Site Evaluation results may create limitations for the Site Evaluation.

Site Evaluations are conducted using the following four-step process as described in Maryland Department of Environment's Site Evaluation Manual.

1. Application submittal and review.
2. Preliminary evaluation.
3. Field investigation.

¹ These examples are illustrative and not a comprehensive list projects meaning the initial development of land.

4. Suitability recommendations.

Applications for Site Evaluations are to be complete and accurate. Applications should include a site drawing with property lines, a proposed sewage disposal area, proposed well locations (if served by a well), and all relevant setbacks and other site constraints (structures, pools, utilities, etc.) Incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant.

The preliminary evaluation staff determines the site's physiologic region (Coastal or Piedmont), the soil testing period (wet season or anytime), and completes a review of the site and adjoining property records. Once the preliminary evaluation is complete, staff will then contact the applicant to schedule a date for field investigation.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the services of a full-sized backhoe and bring approximately 5 gallons of water to the site for the scheduled date. The applicant must contact Miss Utility (1-800-257-7777) to locate buried lines prior to the test date.

Field investigations are required to be completed under the supervision of the Approving Authority.

Between the field investigation and the suitability recommendation, applicants must provide a site drawing, completed by a Maryland licensed surveyor, with property lines, test pits, a designated sewage disposal area, proposed well locations (if served by a well) and all relevant setbacks and other site constraints for review.

Once the site drawing is accepted, assuming acceptable conditions, a letter approving the site evaluation will be provided. The approval letter will provide details of the suitability analysis and a copy of the approved site drawing for the applicant to be used for the septic permit.

If the soil evaluation is unsatisfactory, notice of findings will be provided to the applicant as a preliminary decision. The applicant will then be provided with the opportunity for an informal conference to review the findings. If the unsatisfactory decision is affirmed, the applicant will be notified of a final decision with appeal rights.

Site Evaluations for repair/replacement of an existing OSDS.

Existing properties created with an approved designated disposal area should be able to repair the OSDS within the designated area. However, potential increases in wastewater flow, including, but not limited to, square footage, number of bedrooms, change of use, routine maintenance, age of the system, water supply and any other relevant factors must be considered when determining if a site evaluation is required. A review of records of the property and neighboring properties followed by a site visit will be utilized to determine if a repair can be accomplished with the information on file.

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