

# OPERATION & MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What is Operation & Maintenance (O&M) and why do I need an Operation Permit?**

The O&M program is a state-wide initiative to ensure proper maintenance of Home Sewage Treatment Systems (HSTSs). The goals of the program are to protect public health, minimize pollution of Ohio waters, and extend the life of private sewage systems. Operation permits are required for ALL residential sewage treatment systems by the **Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) Chapter 3701-29**.

### **When did GPH's program start? What is the timeline? How are systems prioritized for enrollment?**

Geauga Public Health (GPH) started issuing Operation Permits for newly installed systems in 2007, however GPH only began enrollment of existing Home Sewage Treatment Systems in 2024. Geauga County has approximately 30,000 Home Sewage Treatment Systems (HSTSs), the second most of any county in Ohio, all of which are scheduled for entry by the end of 2030. To maintain efficiency, systems are being enrolled in phases, prioritized based on system design. Enrollments in each phase will be grouped with other like-systems in the same area. Systems with mechanical treatment components that need more frequent service are being enrolled into the program first, but enrollment of remaining systems will follow shortly. All previously issued Operation Permits will be honored until their expiration.

### **Why is there a permit fee and what is it used for?**

While the program is mandated by the state, funding to run the program was not provided. The money generated from the O&M program pays for the materials and postage used for mailings and the personnel costs for running the program. Personnel costs include preparing mailings, maintaining the database, reviewing submitted service reports, following up on non-compliance and system performance issues, providing homeowner education, and conducting quality control of registered service providers.

### **How will I be notified of my permit fee & requirements? What will happen if I do not pay the fee?**

GPH will provide notice by regular mail at least one month prior to the permit fee payment due date. If payment is not received by the due date, a final notice will be sent certified mail with an additional 25% late penalty. If the fee is not paid following the final notice, GPH will place the fee and late penalty on the tax bill as a lien. Ohio law allows the fiscal office to charge a fee to cover the cost of placing fees on taxes. The lien will then be required to be paid in the next tax year. The final notice will include information on how a homeowner may appeal the action to place a lien.

### **How can I pay for my Operation Permit?**

Permit fees can be paid by check, cash, or card. Card payments are subject to an additional fee from the payment processor.

### **What are the requirements for my Home Sewage Treatment System (HSTS)?**

The requirements for your HSTS can be found in your Operation Permit Application/Letter. The permit requirements are determined by the design of your system. Compliance with your permit requirements is judged based on submission of service reports, and/or pump reports by service providers and pumpers registered in Geauga County.

### **I don't know what kind of system I have. How can I find out?**

All septic documentation on file at GPH is public record and available upon request by calling GPH at (440) 279-1914.

### **Who can perform the required maintenance on my HSTS?**

Systems can only be serviced or pumped by county-registered sewage contractors. For complex/pretreatment systems (Aeration, Drip, or Peat systems) installed since 2007, service providers must hold additional manufacturer-specific certifications. Current lists of the Geauga County-registered pumpers and service providers (and their certifications) can be found at: [gphohio.org/om-septic/](http://gphohio.org/om-septic/). In some cases, for systems installed prior to 2007, homeowners can become certified and provide their own maintenance. To find specific requirements for your system or to learn more about the process of becoming your own service provider, call GPH at (440) 279-1914.

### **Who submits proof of required maintenance? How soon must reports be submitted?**

A registered service provider or pumper must submit proof of service/pumping within 60 days of doing the work, but it is always recommended to keep copies of reports and receipts for your own records as back-up. Scans or pictures of service/pumping reports can also be submitted to GPH by email to: [ehservices@geaugacountyhealth.org](mailto:ehservices@geaugacountyhealth.org).

### **What will happen if I don't do the required maintenance?**

Not completing required maintenance will likely shorten the life expectancy of your system. Per Ohio Administrative Code **(OAC) 3701-29-23(B)(3)**, if you fail to comply with your permit requirements, GPH may opt to perform an inspection of your system and assess the additional cost of that inspection to you. Non-compliance could also result in additional fines and legal action, as specified in the Ohio Revised Code, **(ORC) 3718.99**.

### **I was already issued an Operation Permit when my system was installed. Will I be double-charged?**

No. All new and replacement systems installed since 2007 were issued operation permits along with the installation permits. Depending on when the system was installed (2007-2024), it may be on a 20, 10, or 5-year permit. All previously issued operation permits will be honored until they expire. Upon expiration, these permits will renew with terms and conditions aligned with the design of the system.

### **Do Operation Permits transfer ownership upon sale of a home?**

Yes. Once a system is enrolled into the program, the Operation Permit, and all terms and conditions, will remain associated with the system and will transfer automatically to the new owner upon the sale. Sellers are responsible for disclosing details of the operation permit terms and conditions to buyers. Please inform GPH of property transfers so that owner contact and billing information can be updated promptly.

### **I know my system is failing. Is there any help for homeowners who cannot afford to replace their HSTS?**

GPH is always in search of grants and low-interest loans that can help owners of failing septic systems with the significant costs to repair or replace their system. For 2024, GPH has been awarded \$75,000 in funding from Ohio EPA Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF), a tiered, income-based grant program which can cover or supplement the costs of system repair or replacement. For more information, call: (440) 279-1914.

### **Are For Sale of Property (FSP) evaluations still required?**

No. As of July 1, 2022, FSP evaluations are no longer mandated by Geauga Public Health, but can be performed upon request.

