

Performance Based Treatment Systems Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is this requirement only proposed for portions of Southern Leon County?

In October 2007 the Board of County Commissioners accepted the final report of the Leon Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment (LAVA). That assessment evaluated all of Leon County and identified those areas where the aquifer was, Most Vulnerable, More Vulnerable, Vulnerable and Less Vulnerable. As expected the area of Leon County that almost exclusively is made up of the Most Vulnerable and More Vulnerable areas are those sections of Leon County below the Cody Scarp. The Cody Scarp is roughly south of Tram Road and Orange Avenue. The Primary Springs Protection Zone was established to incorporate this area.

2. Will I have to change to the new system if the ordinance goes into effect?

No. Effective January 1, 2010, the ordinance language only requires new development and redevelopment to use the new performance based systems. Existing systems that continue to function properly may remain in use. After December 31, 2010, systems that fail and need to be repaired would be required to upgrade to a performance based system unless you qualify for the exemption. If you add on to your home and those additions results in an increase of the estimated sewage flow, adding bedrooms or increasing the square footage of the home, you may be required to upgrade to the performance based system if you did not qualify for an exemption?

3. How will I know if I qualify for an exemption?

There are three criterion on which exemptions are based. You must meet all three to qualify for the exemption.

First, the property must be homestead exempted.

Second, the property owner must demonstrate that the Household Income is at or below 80% of the most current Florida Housing Finance Corporation Income Limits Schedule. Household income is the adjusted gross income of the property owner, their spouse and dependents as listed on the most current Internal Revenue Service Income Tax form(s),

Third, the market value of the subject property with improvements according to the Leon County Property Appraiser's database is at or below

the current value threshold as specified in the current Local Housing Assistance Plan.

Example: The market value as listed in the Property Appraiser's database can not exceed \$204,000.00 and the adjusted gross household income shall not exceed the following:

Family of 1	\$35,650.00
Family of 2	\$40,700.00
Family of 3	\$45,800.00
Family of 4	\$50,900.00

4. Can I pump out my system as routine maintenance without having to change to a new performance based system?

Yes. Pumping of the system does not constitute a repair as defined in the State code. It is recommended that septic tanks should be pumped once every 3 – 5 years. Pumping more frequently than that to help a sluggish system function better is an indication that the system is in failure.

5. How much do these system cost?

A survey of local contractors was done for installation cost estimates. The average cost of a standard system for new installation of 3 and 4 bedroom homes are \$2,666.00 and 3,200.00 respectively. The average cost for repairs of the same homes was \$2,334.50 and \$2,966.50. New installation of performance based treatment system for 3 and 4 bedroom homes were \$9,433.00 and \$10,283.00 respectively. The high and low for performance based systems was reported as \$11,000.00 and \$6,800.00 for 3 bedroom and \$12,500.00 and \$7,600.00 for 4 bedroom applications.

6. What is a drip irrigation drainfield?

Drip irrigation drainfields are small pipe pressure distribution systems installed between 6 and 12 inches below grade in a continuous loop configuration. Drip emitters are used to distribute the effluent.

7. Will the County help pay for these expensive systems?

At this time there is no program established to assist homeowners with the cost of these systems. The County Commission did approve the creation of a focus group committee to look at the possibility of a loan program to assist homeowners required to upgrade to performance based systems. That committee is tasked to report to the Commission by January 2010.

8. What are the ongoing maintenance costs and permit fees for these systems?

Performance Based systems are required by state law to be maintained. Maintenance contracts must be maintained by the property owner for the life of the system. Contracts for residential applications are for a 2 year period and cost between \$440.00 and \$600.00 for that 2 year period as reported by local contractors. Additionally, there is a 2 year operating permit fee of \$100.00. Each year the system will be inspected 2 times by the maintenance entity and once by the Health Department. Pump-out of the system, if needed, would be an additional cost.

9. Are there less expensive “passive” systems available in Florida that reduces the Nitrogen in a septic system?

There are currently no passive systems approved for general use in Florida. The Florida Department of Health is conducting a study and a report is due in May of 2010.

10. Will this system work when the power goes out?

No. These systems have mechanical parts that require electricity to operate. If the power goes out the system will not work until the power is restored. Fortunately, if your home is also served by a private well the well pump will not work either and flushing the toilet will not be an option.

11. Will I be able to use my existing septic system if I add on to my home?

If the proposed additions do not result in an increase in the estimated sewage flow and is in good working order you can use your existing system. If the proposed additions increase the estimated sewage flow, typically when you increase the number of bedrooms or add additional living space, a performance based system will be required unless you qualify for the exemptions.

12. How do you determine if my system is failing?

There are several reasons a system fails. The most common are age of the system and overloading the system. Signs of failure are sluggish toilets or drains and sewage backing up into the home not caused by clogged plumbing, visible discharge of sewage in the area of the drainfield or continuously damp or wet areas of the drainfield. To prevent overloading you can; use low flush toilets, low flow fixtures, repair dripping faucets or leaking toilets and spread high water use activities, like laundry, over the week instead of doing multiple loads on a given day.

13. Will this system increase my electric bill?

Yes. These systems use mechanical parts that require electricity. Estimated costs, however, are low. Based on 2.1 KWH per day to run the pumps and approximately \$0.15 per KWH the cost to operate the system is approximately \$0.32 per day or \$9.60 additionally a month.

14. Is the technology behind these systems “unproven”?

No. The systems approved for use in Leon County will be tested and certified by National Sanitation Foundation or American National Sanitation Institute Standard 245. The NSF/ANSI Standard 245 requires that these systems must reduce the effluent Total Nitrogen by at least 50%. Drip Irrigation systems have been used in agricultural applications as an efficient and effective method to fertilize crops. While no specific studies are currently available for drip irrigation drainfield applications, the effectiveness of nitrogen uptake in agricultural applications has been demonstrated.