Disposal Fields

Q: What type of disposal fields are allowed in Manitoba?
A: The disposal fields allowed in Manitoba include subsurface trenches and total area fields as well as above ground systems such as modified total area fields and sand mounds. Grey water fields are also permissible. All disposal field systems require a septic tank or secondary treatment system to pre-treat the wastewater before it is delivered to the disposal field. Information on the types of septic systems and how they work can be found in the Homeowners Manual on the website under the heading Homeowner Information.

Q: **How do I determine the type and size of disposal field required for my property?**
A: The type and size of disposal field depends on many factors including the volume of wastewater produced, the type and depth of suitable soil (e.g., sand, clay), and site conditions such as slope, drainage and available land area. Requirements for disposal fields can be found in the Onsite Wastewater Management Systems Regulation (Schedule A) and the Supplementary Information Manual. These and other important documents are provided on the website under the heading *Regulations, Standards and Guidelines.*

Q: Can new disposal fields be installed on any size property?
A: No. The installation of new disposal fields requires a minimum property size of 0.8 hectares (2.0 acres) and a minimum property width of 60 metres (198 feet).

Q: If I don't meet the minimum property size requirements to install a disposal field, can I obtain a variance?
A: A variance may be possible to install a disposal field if the property was created (subdivided) prior to September 28, 2009 and there is sufficient land area on the property. A completed disposal field registration application may need to be submitted with the variance request to assess any siting limitations on the property. Contact your local environment officer for more information on the variance process.

Q: Can I replace, expand or modify a disposal field on a property that is less than 2 acres and/or has a width of less than 60 m (198 ft)?
A: Possibly, it depends on several factors including the size and dimensions of the property, the property location, the year the property was created (subdivided), and the soil and site conditions. Please contact your local environment officer to discuss your specific situation.

Q: Can I use the existing disposal field on a lot that is less than 2 acres in size or has a site width of less than 60 m (198 ft)? What are my options when the disposal field fails?
A: Yes, an existing disposal field can be used on a property that does not meet the property size or width requirements provided it isn't malfunctioning. When the disposal field fails it may be possible to replace it but this will depend on several factors (see

above). As indicated in the question above, a number of factors need to be considered to determine the options available when the disposal field fails.

Q: If I have an irregular shaped lot with less than 60 m (198 ft) frontage, can I still install a disposal field?
A: The frontage requirements in the regulation should be interpreted as site width. Provided the lot has at least 60 m (198 ft) of site width in the area you wish to install a disposal field, and will conform to all other setback requirements, a disposal field is likely permissible. In this instance a variance is not required.

Q: Are there locations where the installation of new disposal fields is restricted?
A: Yes, there are areas in Manitoba where the installation of new disposal fields is restricted, and in some cases prohibited. These areas include:

- Red River Corridor Designated Area
- Provincial Parks
- Crown Land Cottage Subdivisions
- Sensitive Areas (see Schedule H in regulation)
- Nutrient Management Zone N4
- Properties where municipal wastewater services exist or are proposed

Contact your local environment officer for more information or to discuss potential options.

Q: Can I get approval for a disposal field if my property is in an area where their installation is restricted (e.g., Provincial Park)?
A: Approval may be possible through a variance request and is determined on a case-by-case basis. Please contact your local environment officer to discuss your specific situation. You may be requested to submit a complete disposal field registration with your variance request in order to assess any siting limitations of your property.

Q: Can I install a disposal field system within a Provincial Park if the property is accessible by a sewage pump-out truck?
A: No. Disposal fields are restricted in Provincial parks when the property can be serviced by a sewage pump-out truck and there is a licenced municipal wastewater system that can accept the sewage.

Q: If I can't install, replace, modify, or expand a disposal field, what are my options?
A: The only options are to install a holding tank or connect to a municipal wastewater system.

Q: Can I install a new disposal field in the Red River Corridor Designated Area?
A: It depends. If a property was subdivided after June 16, 2011 a new disposal field cannot be installed in the Red River Corridor Designated Area. Only holding tanks or connection to a municipal wastewater system is permitted for new development. If a

property was subdivided prior to June 16, 2011 a new disposal field may be able to be installed if the property is at least 2 acres in size, has a frontage of at least 198 feet and uses secondary treatment technology. Replacement, expansion or modification of an existing disposal field may be permitted. Contact your local environment officer for more information.

Q: What is the procedure for installing a new disposal field?
A: Prior to installing a new disposal field, the property owner or certified installer must submit a completed application form to register a disposal field system. In addition to the application form, the results from laboratory analysis of at least one soil sample must be submitted along with any other required documents (e.g., design worksheet, water meter flow data). Once the application is reviewed and approved by an Environment Officer, the system can be installed. Application forms, a contact list for Certified Installers, and a list of approved soil testing laboratories can be found on the website.

Q: What are the setback distances from a disposal field?
A: A disposal field needs to be setback at least:

- 6 m (20 ft) from a dwelling without a basement
- 11 m (36 ft) from a dwelling with a basement
- 30 m (100 ft) from a waterbody
- 15 m (50 ft) from a drilled well
- 30 m (100 ft) from other wells and springs
- 8 m (26 ft) from your closest property boundary
- 8 m (26 ft) from water service pipes
- 15 m (50 ft) from an embankment (to a waterbody)
- 8 m (26 ft) from a swimming pool

Q: Where are the setback distances measured from for disposal fields?
A: The setback distance from subsurface disposal fields is measured from the nearest edge of the trench or total area field. For above ground total area fields and sand mounds, setback distances are measured from the toe of the sand layer.

Q: I have an aging disposal field that I would like to modify, expand or replace. Is this permissible?
A: The answer to this question is very site specific. Please contact your local environment officer to discuss your situation.

Q: I'm rebuilding or moving a dwelling onto a property with an existing disposal field, can I connect to the existing field?
A: It is permissible to connect to an existing disposal field system provided it is operating properly and the septic tank and disposal field are appropriately sized for the dwelling it will serve. It is recommended that the system be inspected and evaluated by a certified installer to ensure it will operate effectively when connected to the new dwelling.

Q: How long does a disposal field last?
A: The life expectancy of a disposal field can vary dramatically and depends on many factors. Properly designed, installed, operated and maintained disposal fields can perform effectively for 20 years or more. When any of these factors are neglected, disposal fields will not perform effectively and can malfunction or fail sooner than they should.

Q: What do I need to know about operating and maintaining my disposal field system?
A: Proper operation and maintenance of disposal field systems is essential to ensure adequate performance and longevity. Improper operation and maintenance can lead to system failure, the creation of public health and environmental hazards, and expensive repairs or system replacement. Information on operating and maintaining your septic systems can be found in the Homeowner's Manual on the website. You can also contact you're an environment officer for more information.

Q: Is there anything I should add to my septic system to make it work better?
A: No. Septic systems rely on natural biological, chemical and physical processes in the septic tank and the soil to treat wastewater. The organic materials and bacteria needed for these processes to work efficiently are already present in the wastewater and soil. The addition of extra organic materials like meat, vegetables or animal carcasses will only make the system work harder and could overload it. As well, studies have shown that commercially available septic tank additives containing bacteria or enzymes can do more harm than good and therefore should not be added to the system. The operation and maintenance guidance in the Homeowners Manual will help ensure effective system operation.

Q: Do I need to submit a Registration Application to perform minor repairs on my septic system?
A: No. Minor repairs such as replacing an access riser, pump, control system, distribution box, or broken pipes do not require submission of a registration application or any other form of approval. Minor repairs also include unclogging plugged distribution pipes. However, modification, expansion or replacement of part or all of a disposal field system requires submission of a registration application and approval by an environment officer.

Q: My existing disposal field is failing. What are my options?
A: It depends on the extent and reason for the failure. Disposal fields that are seeping and discharging wastewater onto the ground surface often cannot be repaired because the soil is saturated and plugged with wastewater materials. These systems need to be replaced with a new, approved system. In cases where only a portion of the disposal field is failing, or the system is failing intermittently, it may be possible to repair, modify or expand the system. Property owners are advised to contact a certified installer to inspect and evaluate potential options for correcting system malfunctions. Please see

the Homeowner's Manual and information for Malfunctioning Systems: Causes and Corrections on the website, or contact an environment officer.

Q: I've noticed odours and wetness/seepage around my disposal field. Should I be concerned?
A: Yes. Odours and seepage are indications that the disposal field is malfunctioning and may need to be replaced, modified or expanded. A certified installer should be hired to inspect the system to determine the cause of the malfunction and potential solutions. You can also contact an environment officer for more information.

Q: What do I need to do to decommission an existing disposal field system?
A: Disposal fields that are no longer in use need to be decommissioned in accordance with Schedule I in the Onsite Wastewater Management System Regulation. There is a guideline on how to decommission septic tanks and disposal fields on the website. As well, there is a decommissioning form on the website that the property owner needs to complete and submit to the local Regional Environment Office within seven days of decommissioning the system.

Q: How do I prevent my disposal field from freezing in the winter?
A: The most effective way to prevent freezing of disposal field systems is through proper design and installation. Additional measures include:

- Cover the disposal field with a minimum 30 cm (12 inch) thick layer of hay or straw during the winter months
- Contruct a snow fence around the disposal field
- Ensure system components like pipes and access risers are adequately insulated
- Do not drive or park vehicles over any portion of the septic system
- Maintain a healthy vegetative cover over the disposal field
- While on vacation have a family member or friend run some water into the system on a daily basis.

A certified installer should be contacted to evaluate the system if freezing is an ongoing issue. Additional information can be found in the Homeowners Manual on the website (see Troubleshooting).

Q: I'm building a granny suite. Can I connect it to my existing septic system?
A: Probably not. A granny suite will significantly increase the volume of wastewater discharged to the system. If the existing septic tank and disposal field are not sized to accommodate the additional flow, the granny suite cannot be connected to the existing system unless it can be expanded. If expansion isn't possible, a holding tank or new disposal field system would need to be approved and installed to service the granny suite.

Q: I'm building a new garage or shop with a washroom. Can I hook it up to my existing septic system?
A: Yes, provided the washroom will be used by the property owners only and no additional wastewater will be generated (e.g., home business). Wastewater from the garage or shop needs to be discharged to the inlet end of the existing septic tank using

a gravity pipe or pump system with a grinder pump. Please contact a certified installer or environment officer to discuss your specific project.

Q: Can I install two disposal field systems on my property?
A: Yes, provided there is sufficient suitable land area and the addition of a second building or residence is allowed under Municipal Bylaw.

Q: What type of sand media is required for lining or building-up disposal fields?
A: The sand used in sand mounds as well as modified and above ground total area fields must meet CSA standard A23.1 for concrete sand (also known as ASTM C33). The sand used for lining trenches and total area fields must meet ASTM C33 specifications or have a texture classification of loamy sand. ASTM C33 sand is recommneded for all disposal fields that require sand media. Specifications for ASTM C33 sand can be found on the website under Regulations, Standards and Guidelines.

Q: What type of piping should I use for my septic system?
A: The piping used for septic systems should be certified by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). There are different types of pipe used for gravity and pressure distribution applications as well as for pump discharge pipes. Please contact your local supplier to discuss the best pipe options for your system.

Q: What is the difference between a pressurized disposal field and a gravity field?
A: Pressurized disposal fields utilize a pump to distribute wastewater through small diameter distribution pipes (1 – 1.25 inches) under pressure. Gravity disposal fields utilize larger diameter pipes (4.0 inch) that are not pressurized and rely on gravity to distribute the wastewater. In most cases, gravity systems also utilize a pump to deliver wastewater to the disposal field but the pipes are too large to be pressurized. Pressurized disposal fields provide better wastewater distribution, which enhances treatment and system longevity. They are also more challenging to design and install than gravity systems. Contact an environmnet officer for further information.

Q: Do I need to expand the existing septic system when I expand my dwelling?
A: It depends. If expansion of the dwelling will increase the daily wastewater flow and the existing septic tank and disposal field are not sized for this flow then the system will need to be expanded. In some cases expansion of the septic system may not be possible and the system will need to be replaced. If expansion of the dwelling will not increase the daily wastewater flow then the septic system does not need to be expanded.

Q: Can an environment officer inspect my field? I think it's failing and don't know how to fix it.
A: No. Environment officers do not evaluate existing septic systems. Please contact a Certified Installer.

Q: How do I take a soil sample and where do I send it?
A: Soil sampling instructions are provided in the Supplementary Information Manual on the website. A list of approved soil testing laboratories can also be found on the website under the heading Soil Information and Approved Soil Testing Laboratories.

Q: Where can I buy graded stone for my disposal field?
A: Graded stone can be purchased from local suppliers. Please check the internet or yellow pages.

Q: What kind of fabric can I use to cover the stone in my disposal field?
A: Non-woven geotextile fabric is required for covering graded stone and can be obtained from local suppliers.

Q: My property is located in a flood prone area. What impact does flooding have on a disposal field and what can I do to protect it?
A: There is a Flood Fact Sheet on the website that provides information on the impacts of flooding on septic systems and what property owners can do before, during and after a flood event.

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