



## **FAQ: SEPTIC SYSTEMS AND FIRE REBUILDS**

### **My house was destroyed in a fire and I plan to rebuild a home that has additional bedrooms or plumbing fixture units. Can I still use my existing septic system?**

If the existing septic system is functioning and the owner wants to build a structure with an increased number of plumbing fixture units or bedroom equivalents, a full certification by the Ventura County Environmental Health Division (Division) will be required. A Full Certification consists of:

1. Soils Report (you may use an existing soils report for property if available)
2. Pumpers Report
  - a. Condition of existing septic system
  - b. Location and type of dispersal system

If the existing septic system is undersized for the proposed structure, a new septic system will be required. The Division will need to review and approve the size, design, and location of the new septic system prior to installation. The new system will need to conform to current building code standards.

### **My house was destroyed in a fire and I plan to rebuild the *same house*. Can I still use my existing septic system?**

In general, there are two categories you may fit into:

Scenario 1: No changes to original dwelling (“like-for-like” no additional bedrooms, or plumbing fixtures), AND there are records and/or permits available for the existing septic system.

Existing septic system will be evaluated by Division staff for conformance to code (at time septic system was installed) and operation. Provide Septic Pumper’s Report to verify septic system condition/functionality.

Scenario 2: No changes to original dwelling (“like-for-like” no additional bedrooms, or plumbing fixtures), AND there are no records and/or permits available for the existing septic system.

If there are no records or permits your existing septic system, Division staff will need more information to properly evaluate and approve the existing system. Applicant will need to provide:

1. Soils Report (you may use an existing soils report for property if available)
2. Septic Pumper’s Report
  - a. Condition of Existing septic system
  - b. Location and type of Dispersal System
3. Record of buildings being replaced and connecting to existing septic system (Building and Safety, Assessors, etc.).

If the existing septic system does not meet minimum code standards, a new or upgraded septic system may be required. However, requests for variances will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

## **What is a “request for variance”?**

If your existing septic system does not meet minimum standards, but is in good repair, functioning properly, and not creating or at risk to create a nuisance or threat to public health or the environment, the Division may be able to authorize your existing system as an existing, legal, non-conforming septic system.

## **What are some of the reasons why the Division will not be able to certify my existing septic system?**

Some examples of non-conforming septic system include:

1. Multiple dwelling units connected to a single septic tank
2. Cesspools (no variances will be given to cesspools)
3. The existing septic system does not meet setback requirements to water wells, waterbodies (streams, lakes), groundwater, etc.
4. Existing septic system is undersized for the proposed structures.

## **Why should I have to upgrade or replace my existing septic system?**

Domestic wastewater may contain harmful bacteria and viruses, nitrates, and household chemicals. Older septic systems may pose a potential threat to public health or the environment. Septic systems can deteriorate over time and typically last 20-30 years before requiring repair. Septic systems treat wastewater by removing contaminants through physical, biological, and in some cases chemical means. A septic system that does not meet setback to waterbodies, is undersized, improperly installed, failing, or poorly maintained has the potential to create a public nuisance and/or contaminate groundwater. When certifying or approving your septic system, the Division needs to make sure it is not creating or at risk to create a nuisance or threat to public health, safety, or the environment. Division staff will evaluate each system on a case-by-case basis, and work with property owners to find a “best-fit” solution for the disposal of domestic wastewater which is reasonable as well as protective of human health and the environment.

## **My septic system was damaged in the fire or removed during the debris removal process. What are my options?**

If your existing septic system, or any components, are damaged, a septic system repair permit is required before abandoning the old system and installing a replacement system. The new septic system will need to conform to current building code standards.

## **Questions? Please contact us!**

- Ventura County Environmental Health Division Main Office Phone: 805/654-2813
- OWTS website: <https://vcrma.org/onsite-wastewater-treatment-systems>
- Information on Septic Pumper Truck Companies: <https://vcrma.org/septic-tank-pumper-trucks>
- Historical records of your septic system may be available at: <https://vcrma.org/isds-record-search>