PLANNING A NEW SEPTIC SYSTEM?



Building a home or purchasing vacant land is exciting, but if the property does not have access to a public sewer system, there is one important thing to consider: Is the property suitable for a septic system? A septic system treats and disperses household wastewater on the property. Before installation, the land must be evaluated to determine what type of system may be appropriate. Here are four important things property owners should understand before getting started.

Not Every Property Is Suitable for the Same System

A property's size alone does not determine whether it can support a septic system.
Several factors affect system placement and design, including:

- Soil type and characteristics.
- Property slope and terrain.
- Groundwater conditions.
- Available space and required setbacks.
- The home's expected wastewater needs.

These factors help determine whether a conventional septic system or an approved alternative design may be appropriate.

Soil Testing and Site Evaluations Matter

Before designing a septic system, the property may require soil testing and a site evaluation.
A percolation test measures how quickly water moves through the soil. This helps determine whether the soil may be suitable for wastewater dispersal. Other evaluations may examine soil layers, groundwater, and property conditions.

Why is this important? A system must be designed for the conditions of the specific property. Evaluating the land early can help identify potential limitations before construction moves forward.

Choosing the Right Septic System

Not every property requires the same septic system. Depending on site conditions and local approval, possible options may include:

- **Conventional systems**: Typically use a septic tank and soil absorption area.
- **Seepage pit systems:** Disperse wastewater into suitable surrounding soil through an approved underground structure.
- **Mound systems:** Use an elevated, specially constructed soil treatment area.
- **Alternative treatment systems:** Use additional treatment methods when required or approved.

The appropriate system depends on the property's conditions and local regulations. Not every option is suitable or permitted at every location.

Understand Permits and Long-Term Maintenance

In California, septic systems are subject to state and local requirements. Property owners should contact the appropriate permitting authority before beginning installation.
For properties in Kern County, the Environmental Health Division provides information about septic applications, soil testing, system design, and permitting.
It's also important to plan for maintenance after installation. The EPA generally recommends septic inspections every one to three years and pumping every three to five years, depending on household size, tank condition, and usage.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can every vacant property support a septic system?
No. Soil conditions, groundwater, slope, available space, and local requirements all affect whether a property can support a septic system.

What is a percolation test?
It measures how quickly water moves through soil and may be part of determining whether the property is suitable for a proposed septic system.

Who handles septic permits in Kern County?
Kern County Environmental Health provides septic permitting and onsite wastewater system information for properties within its jurisdiction.

Planning to Build in the Tehachapi Area?
Before beginning construction, make sure you understand your property's septic requirements.
Sim Sanitation provides septic installation and related services in Tehachapi and surrounding communities.
Call 661-823-8442 or visit simsanitation.com to learn more.