



WHAT HOMEBUILDERS NEED TO KNOW

Meeting the Septic System Permitting Requirements Under the Springs and Aquifer Protection Act

Why are the permitting requirements for septic systems changing?

In 2016, the Florida Legislature identified 30 “Outstanding Florida Springs” that require additional protections to ensure their conservation and restoration for future generations. These protections will be outlined in restoration plans, known as Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs), focused on reducing nitrogen pollution that is impacting the water quality of these springs.

In some areas, the water leaving septic tanks has been identified as a major contributor to nitrogen pollution. Where this occurs, the law requires the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to include a septic system remediation plan within that spring’s BMAP. The law requires specific actions regarding both existing and new septic systems located near impacted springs within areas known as Priority Focus Areas.

Why are these changes to septic system permitting important?

Nitrogen pollution is impacting the water quality of many of Florida’s Outstanding Springs. Water from conventional septic systems is high in nitrogen, and that water leaves the septic system drainfield, reaches the aquifer and emerges in springs. While conventional septic systems are good at removing many pollutants from wastewater, they are not designed to remove nitrogen. To restore spring water quality, contributing septic systems need to be either removed or upgraded to include enhanced nitrogen-reducing technology.

Why are septic systems being addressed only in certain areas?

Septic systems pose the highest threat to water quality in areas where they are located near springs with highly permeable (sandy) soil. These vulnerable areas are identified as Priority Focus Areas in the remediation plans.

How can I find out if a lot is affected by new system permitting requirements?

Requirements for new septic system permits apply to lots less than one acre within a Priority Focus Area. A searchable map of PFAs can be found by visiting FloridaDEP.gov/PFAMap.

When will new permitting requirements for new systems go into effect?

The permitting requirements for new septic systems on lots less than one acre within the Priority Focus Areas became effective for eight BMAP areas on January 5, 2019. Five additional BMAP areas are pending the conclusion of legal challenges.

How and where will permitting for new septic systems change?

Requirements for installation of new septic systems on lots of less than one acre within Priority Focus Areas will change. These new systems will be required to include enhanced treatment of nitrogen. The installation of nitrogen reducing systems will not be required if a central sewer connection project is planned by the local government and the project has been included in the remediation plan. These changes will apply to all new system permits on lots less than one acre within the Priority Focus Area of an adopted BMAP. You can find out if your home lies within an adopted BMAP’s Priority Focus Area by visiting FloridaDEP.gov/PFAMap.

What is considered a “new” septic system?

New system installations are defined by current Department of Health (DOH) rules. In general, new is defined as an installation of a system where a system has never been installed. For more information on which septic systems are considered new, please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.

How can I find out if central sewer is planned for a specific area and included as project in the remediation plan?

Residents can find out if central sewer is planned for their community by contacting the public works or utility department of their local city or county government.

What nitrogen-reducing technologies can be permitted in Florida?

DOH, which permits and regulates septic systems, has several options for nitrogen-reducing technology. DOH is also currently undergoing rule development to allow for the permitting of an additional nitrogen-reducing technology. Rule development is ongoing.

Where can I find a septic contractor that can install this type of technology?

You can find a list of septic tank contractors on DOH’s website at www.FloridaHealth.gov.

Is there any funding assistance available to homebuilders to cover the increased cost of upgrading to the required enhanced system?

As with any update to the building code, these additional requirements are now part of the conditions of locating a new home septic system near an Outstanding Florida Spring. No state funding is available to pay homebuilder costs.