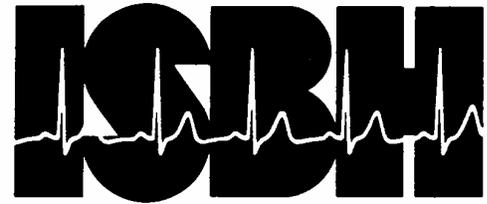


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INDIANA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

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December 19, 1991

**To:** Local Health Departments

**From:** Alan M. Dunn, R.E.H.S., Chief *AMD*  
Residential Sewage Disposal Section  
Division of Sanitary Engineering

**Subject:** Construction of Residential On-site  
Sewage Disposal Systems During  
Wet Weather

We have received recent inquiries about the construction of residential soil absorption systems in clayey soils during periods of wet weather when the soil is sufficiently wet at the depth of installation to exceed its plastic limit. Our concern about construction during wet weather is caused by the probability of damage to the soil, especially smearing of soil surfaces, which may result in irreversible damage to the infiltrative surfaces of the absorption field. Such damage, if it occurs, will significantly reduce the life span of the soil absorption system.

These concerns are stated for each type of on-site sewage disposal system in Sections 52 through 56 of Indiana State Board of Health Rule 410 IAC 6-8.1, Residential Sewage Disposal Systems. Subsections within each of these sections state that the "... systems shall not be constructed in clayey soils during periods of wet weather when the soil is sufficiently wet at the depth of installation to exceed its plastic limit. This includes those soils classified as sandy loam, silt loam, loam, clay loam, silty clay loam, sandy clay, silty clay, and clay. For the purpose of this rule, the plastic limit of the soil shall be considered to have been exceeded when the soil can be rolled between the palms of the hands to produce threads one-eighth (1/8) inch in diameter without breaking apart and crumbling." The rule further explains that "Excessive smearing of the usable absorption trench sidewalls or bottom during construction may result in irreversible damage to the soil infiltrative surface and may be grounds for rejection of the site and/or the system."

Please note that the provisions of Rule 410 IAC 6-8.1 do not prohibit the construction of soil absorption systems during any specific part of the year, such as during wintertime. Most clayey soils have elevated moisture levels during the late fall,

winter, and early spring due to increased precipitation and significantly reduced rates of evaporation and transpiration. Therefore, although it is important to check soil moisture prior to construction throughout the year, it is especially critical during the late fall, winter, and early spring. If this check reveals that the soil is too wet, then construction of the soil absorption system must be postponed until the soil moisture drops to an acceptable level.

We have also been approached as to how the construction and occupancy of a residence may proceed, or occupancy of an existing residence with a failed septic system may continue, when the soil is too wet for the construction of a soil absorption system. Construction of a residence may not begin until a permit for a residential sewage disposal system has been obtained from the health department [(Rule 410 IAC 6-8.1-33(a))]. Upon receipt of that permit, the construction of the residence may proceed. If the situation is a repair or alteration of an existing system, construction of the system may not proceed without a permit from the local health department [Rule 410 IAC 6-8.1-33(a)].

Rule 410 IAC 6-8.1-31(e) states that "A temporary sewage holding tank is an alternative method of sewage disposal subject to the written approval of the commissioner required in subsection (f)." Subsection (f) states that "If any conditions preclude the installation of a residential sewage disposal system as described in this rule, the local board of health may not approve the use of any other alternative residential sewage disposal system without the express written approval of the commissioner."

If soil wetness conditions preclude the prompt installation of the soil absorption system, we have no objection to the installation of the septic tank and dosing tank (if required), and the use of those facilities as temporary sewage holding facilities until the soil absorption system may be constructed. This memorandum serves as the written approval of the commissioner under such circumstances, when the following conditions are met:

1. A permit has been issued for a residential sewage disposal system which meets all the provisions of State Board of Health Rule 410 IAC 6-8.1, and all pertinent local ordinances.
2. Soil wetness conditions preclude the prompt installation of the soil absorption systems. This memorandum does not address the use of temporary sewage holding tanks under any other circumstances.
3. The applicant shall meet all requirements set forth by the local health department for the use of the septic tank and/or dosing tank for temporary sewage holding facilities.

4. The applicant shall obtain the written approval of the local health department for the use of the septic tank and/or dosing tank as a temporary sewage holding tank.
5. The area for the construction of the soil absorption system is fenced off to protect it from damage. If the site is damaged prior to the construction of the soil absorption system, a new evaluation shall be conducted and a modified permit issued [Rule 410 IAC 6-8.1-48(c)]. The property owner shall be advised that he bears the responsibility for the protection of the site from damage.
6. The outlet to the septic tank, or the dosing tank, whichever is applicable, shall be blocked to prevent the discharge of any wastewater.
7. The septic tank and/or dosing tank shall be pumped as needed by a licensed septic tank cleaner to prevent the overflow or discharge of any wastewater. We recommend that a written contract be maintained with a licensed septic tank cleaner.
8. The temporary sewage holding tank shall not be used for more than one year from the date of approval. By such time, the applicant shall have constructed the soil absorption system or shall have provided for another legal means of wastewater disposal.
9. At the completion of its use, the temporary holding tank shall be converted to use as a septic tank and/or dosing tank, or properly abandoned, as directed by the local health department.

cc: Durland H. Patterson, Jr.  
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Staff