



SEPTIC DECOMMISSIONING

Septic tanks, cesspools and seepage pits are required by OAR 340-071-0185 to be decommissioned when the systems are no longer in use. A Decommissioning Permit is required to document the decommissioning and record the location of the decommissioned septic system.

A **Decommissioning Permit** must be obtained when:

- A sewerage system becomes available and the facility the system serves has been connected to that sewerage system;
- Demolition of structures previously served by a septic system;
- The system has been operated, constructed or altered in violation of the DEQ Onsite Rules;
- New construction (e.g. a home, addition, garage, ADU, deck, etc.) is proposed within 10 feet of an abandoned system;
- A land division is proposed on a property with an abandoned system.
- A property line adjustment is proposed that would result in an abandoned system being located on a different lot or within five (5) feet of the adjusted property line.

How do I know if my property has an abandoned septic system?

Every property that had a home or building with water service and was constructed prior to the availability of public sewer, had a septic system.

East of the Willamette River, most septic systems were **cesspools**, which are typically 3 to 4 feet in diameter cylinders, about 15 feet deep with perforations made of either brick or concrete. Cesspools are typically located 10 to 12 feet away from the exterior foundation of adjacent buildings.

West of the Willamette River, properties more commonly had **septic tanks** and drainfields. Septic tanks may be concrete or metal; average size of 5 to 7 feet long by 5 to 7 feet deep. Septic tanks can be 5 to 30 feet or more away from adjacent buildings.

How do I determine whether a property has a septic system?

1. Go to www.portlandmaps.com and enter the property address in the search box.
2. Click on the **Property** tab and then the **Summary** tab. Note the year built on the **Summary** page.
3. Click on the **Historical Permits** tab to access available plumbing records through the Historic Permit Records Viewer.

Note: There is a drop-down list in the upper-right corner of the viewer. There may be additional permit records accessed by selecting from the drop-down list. Each permit record may contain several pages. Most plumbing records have a table and narrative description on the front and a drawing on the back, so print double-sided and keep track of the front and back of each record. If the records do not show decommission FILLED, it was not decommissioned.

4. Septic systems may be indicated in the plumbing record table, narrative description or drawing. In many cases, there will not be a record of a septic system; however, if the year built precedes the date of sewer connection, the property is likely to have a septic system.

How do I locate an abandoned septic tank or cesspool?

Locate the main plumbing vent stack coming through the roof and visualize a straight line extending from the exterior foundation line. From the foundation follow the building sewer line straight out to the cesspool or septic tank. Cesspools are commonly 12 feet straight out from the foundation. Septic tanks may be 5 to 30 feet from the foundation. Following the original plumbing and building sewer line is the most reliable way to find them.

The top of cesspools are typically about 3 to 5 feet below ground surface (bgs) if the building does not have a basement. If the building has a basement with plumbing, cesspools are commonly 8 to 10 feet bgs. Prior to the 1950's, cesspools were typically constructed of brick. After the 1950's, cesspools were typically made of precast concrete rings.

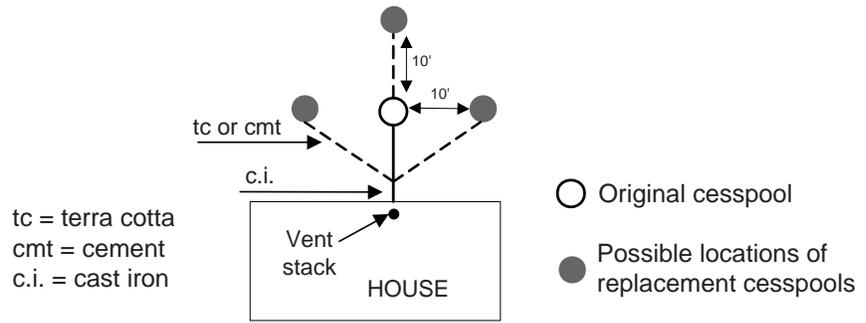
Replacement Cesspools

Replacement cesspools are typically located straight out or offset at a 45° angle and about 10 feet away from the original cesspool (see diagram).

For example, a record showing a cesspool located 22 feet from a building is most likely a replacement cesspool, regardless of what the plumbing record narrative may or

may not say. Similarly, if the plumbing record shows a new cesspool in 1971, but the home was built in 1943, there are

two cesspools to look for, one of brick and one of concrete.



How do I decommission a septic system?

Step 1: Complete and submit a Sanitation Evaluation Application and appropriate fees to:

- **In Person:** Come to the City of Portland, Development Services Center, Trade Permits, 1900 SW 4th Ave., First floor, Portland, OR 97201. For Hours Call 503-823-7310 | Select option 1.
- **By Mail:** Send completed application and check payable to the City of Portland, Attention: Trade Permits, 1900 SW 4th Ave., Suite 5000, Portland, OR 97201.

Step 2: Locate the tank and/or cesspool/seepage pit.

- A. Pump out any sewage in the system (if applicable) – A DEQ-licensed sewage disposal provider is required to pump any residual solid and liquid wastes. A copy of the pumping receipt will need to be submitted to the inspector prior to inspection approval.
- B. Fill using suitable material (cannot use common soil or dirt) to within 1 foot of the top of the brick or concrete rings or have suitable fill material on site and leave the cesspool, seepage pit or tank open.
 1. Suitable materials include:
 - a. ¾ inch minus gravel.
 - b. Masonry or playground sand.
 - c. Concrete slurry.
 2. If using sand or gravel, fill in lifts of 1 to 5 feet thick and water down and/or tamp for better compaction. If a new foundation will be constructed within 10 feet of the septic system, an engineer may require that fill be placed as structural fill and compaction testing required. Consult with an engineer when appropriate.

Step 3: Request the inspection after properly filling the system and prior to covering.

- A. Call 503-823-7000 (IVR Request Line).
- B. Request #842 Decommissioning inspection.

Step 4: After inspection approval, complete filling to final grade.