



Division of Environmental Health

## Frequently asked questions- Building permit reviews by the Calvert County Health Department Division of Environmental Health

- 1. Why does the Calvert County Health Department Division of Environmental Health (EH) review building permits submitted through the county government?** *All building permits begin with application at the Calvert County Office of Inspections and Permits. Several different county and state agencies review building permit applications and the office of Inspections and Permits coordinates the review process. EH reviews building permits for properties served or to be served by an individual water supply system (well) or individual on-site sewage disposal system (OSDS aka septic system) or properties where food handling or service is proposed. We conduct reviews for these types of buildings/properties so that we can protect public health and the environment by ensuring compliance with current statutes and regulations.*
- 2. What is EH looking for when conducting building permit reviews?** *For properties served or to be served by a well or OSDS, EH reviews and determines whether or not the existing systems are adequate to serve the existing and proposed use of the building. In those cases where the OSDS capability is questionable, an assessment of the system may be required. For detailed information about what is needed for an OSDS assessment see the ["Existing private well and OSDS Assessment form"](#). We also review whether or not appropriate setbacks are maintained from wells and OSDS. When reviewing building permit proposals for food service facilities, we have an extensive list of plan review items that we look for. For more detailed information on plan review for food service facilities see <http://www.calverthealth.org/community/environmentalhealthservices/PDF/PlanReviewPacket.pdf>*
- 3. If I put an addition on or remodel my house, will I need to upgrade my septic system (OSDS)?** *The answer to this question depends on several factors including but not limited to what records are available of the existing OSDS, how the OSDS was constructed, what the proposed or potential use of the addition will be, whether the proposal is considered an alteration to the existing house, and whether the proposal will result in changes to the volume or character of the wastewater generated. If the existing OSDS is found to be adequate, EH will approve the building permit. It is sometimes the case that when significant additions of living space or additional bedrooms are added to a dwelling, the OSDS will need to be upgraded or replaced to accommodate the change. EH requires that all permit applications for additions or remodeling include detailed floor plans showing both existing and proposed conditions (to scale or with measurements).*

4. **Will I be able to install a swimming pool in my yard?** *Several agencies will have to weigh in on a building permit application of this type. EH may be able to approve the construction of a swimming pool (in-ground or above ground) on a property served by a well and an OSDS if the proposed swimming pool site does not conflict with the setback requirements for the well, the OSDS itself or the designated sewage disposal area. The setback requirement from a well to a swimming pool is **30 feet** and **25 feet** from any part of the OSDS or sewage disposal area. If the appropriate setbacks cannot be maintained, you may explore the possibility of relocation of your designated sewage disposal area to an alternate acceptable area on your property that does not have any structures. Any alterations to the sewage disposal area for a property must be done by a licensed surveyor, submitted to EH for approval and may require additional percolation testing.*
  
5. **Will I be able to build a deck or a shed in my sewage disposal area?** *No. Designated sewage disposal areas (usually 10,000 square feet) must remain free of structures or buildings. You may, however, explore the possibility of relocation of your designated sewage disposal area to an alternate acceptable area on your property that does not have any structures. Any alterations to the sewage disposal area for a property must be done by a licensed surveyor, submitted to EH for approval and may require additional percolation testing.*
  
6. **Do I need a building permit for finishing my basement and what requirements would there be from EH?** *You will definitely need a building permit to finish the basement of a dwelling. The permit process will start with the Calvert County Office of Inspections and permits. If the property is served by a well or an OSDS, EH will review the floor plans submitted and take into consideration the total enclosed living space, number of bedrooms, any reasonable foreseeable increases in sewage generation, and the current system design and construction. If the system is found to be adequate, EH will approve the permit. If the system is found to be inadequate, EH will send you a letter advising you that the OSDS will need to be upgraded or replaced to accommodate the change. This will likely require additional percolation testing, an evaluation of the existing system and surveyor's site plan demonstrating that the lot is capable of providing for adequate sewage disposal area.*
  
7. **If I am required to upgrade my OSDS, what are the steps that I need to follow?** *The first step in the process would be to complete and submit a ["Site Evaluation/Sanitary Construction Permit Application"](#) to EH with the appropriate fee. We are located at 150 Main St. Suite 100 in Prince Frederick and are open from 7:30am to 4:30pm Monday-Friday (excluding holidays). The next step would be to hire a licensed septic installer to coordinate with EH to excavate and conduct soil evaluations and percolation testing. An evaluation/assessment of the existing OSDS may be conducted at this time if it hasn't already been conducted. Once the results of the soil and site evaluations are collected, EH will issue specifications for OSDS needed to serve the proposed use. Those specifications will need to be sent to a licensed surveyor (if deemed necessary) so that a site plan may be prepared demonstrating that the lot is capable of providing enough sewage disposal area to accommodate the proposed use. EH will review the site plans and approve them when appropriate. Depending on the circumstances, the Sanitary Construction permit will either be issued prior to (with OSDS installation up-front) or concurrent with the approval of the building permit. The reviewing Environmental Health Specialist (EHS) will make the decision regarding the sequence of approvals based on individual site conditions and details of the proposal.*

8. **Can I get approval for an addition or finished basement by using the “Fast track” permitting process?** *It may be possible for an addition or finished basement to be approved by EH through the “Fast track” process; however it is not common to find an existing OSDS has been sufficiently designed to serve a substantial increase in square footage of living space, bedrooms, or the reasonable foreseeable increases that most finished basements and additions represent. Seeing as the “Fast track” process only allows for our EHSs to perform a file search and review, most proposals of this nature or any proposal that results in additional square footage of enclosed living space are not able to be approved through the “Fast track” process and require additional review. Additional review typically includes an on-site visit to assess the current systems and available land area for on-site sewage disposal. If the findings of the file review and site visit indicate that further investigation is warranted, the EHS will require an assessment of the system in accordance with the previously mentioned [“Existing private well and OSDS Assessment form”](#).*
9. **What are the setback requirements from my well and OSDS to something that I want to add to my property?** *See table below:*

<b>Structure type</b>	<b>Setback from well (ft)</b>	<b>Setback from OSDS* (ft)</b>
In –ground pool	30	25
Above-ground pool	30	10
Shed	30	10
Garage	30	10
Deck	30	2 (tank to piers)
Addition (slab or crawl)	30	10
Addition (basement)	30	20

\*OSDS includes the tank locations, disposal component, sewage disposal area and designated replacement areas.