

## Sand Filter and Pressure Distribution Maintenance

Septic system owners are responsible for the maintenance of their system. For sand filter or pressure distribution system owners, this includes control of soil erosion over the sand filter, control of large perennial plants, keeping livestock off the system, control of burrowing animals, and performing routine maintenance inspections and tasks.

**Important:** Please take the appropriate safety precautions while performing these maintenance requirements. Sewage contains harmful bacteria and viruses.

### Required inspections

Oregon Administrative Rule 340-71-290(7) states that the septic tank and dosing tank must be inspected every 3 years for sludge and scum accumulation. The septic tank(s) must be pumped before surface floating scum accumulations within the tank are within three inches from the bottom of the outlet tee and when sludge from the bottom of the tank is six inches below the bottom of the outlet tee.

### Maintenance

DEQ recommends pumping the septic tank when the solids accumulation is 35 percent of the tank volume. Pumping the dosing tank, or pump chamber of a two-compartment tank, at the same time is also recommended.

Test the pump and alarm operation at least once each year by manually lifting each float switch inside of the dosing tank of pump chamber.

Test pump cycle volume by measuring the sewage level in the tank at the start of pumping and again at pump turn-off. The proper pump cycle volume on a residential sand filter is ten percent (or 45 gallons per cycle) and a rule of thumb is about four inches in a concrete two-compartment septic tank or two inches in a single compartment dosing septic tank. Pressure distribution drainfields can receive 90 gallons per pump cycle – that’s twice as much so double the rule of thumb values for visual reference.

Inspect the screen around the pump at least once each year and clean as necessary. It needs to be cleaned when it is about 50 percent clogged.

Wash the pump screen over the septic tank manhole.

Flush sand filter and pressure distribution drainfield pipes. Sand filter and pressure distribution systems constructed after 1995 should have cleaning valves at the ground surface. Flush the lateral pressure distribution pipes within the sand filter and pressure distribution systems at least once a year. Flush each lateral pipe separately and be mindful of the liquid level in the tank (don’t run the pump dry).



*Sand filter squirt test during system construction.*

Cars require air and oil filter inspections, cleaning and replacement to keep performing, and these systems do too! These systems are expensive to construct and need care to last as long as possible.

Sound like more than you want to take on yourself? There are maintenance providers that do this every day. Our website lists [certified maintenance providers](#), though one doesn’t need to be certified to perform maintenance on residential sand filters or pressure distribution systems. As with hiring any contractor, check references.

### Alternative Formats

*Alternative formats of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ’s Office of Communications & Outreach for more information at (503) 229-5696.*

*Hearing impaired dial 711.*



State of Oregon  
Department of  
Environmental  
Quality

### Water Quality Onsite Program Eugene

165 East 7<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Eugene, OR 97401  
Phone: (541) 687-7338  
Fax: (541) 686-7551  
Toll Free: (800) 844-8467  
Contact: Randy Trox  
[www.oregon.gov/DEQ](http://www.oregon.gov/DEQ)

### Western Region Coos Bay

381 N. Second St  
Coos Bay, OR 97420  
Phone: (541) 269-2721  
Fax: (541) 269-7984  
Toll Free: (800) 452-4011

### Western Region Medford

221 Stewart Ave, Suite 201  
Medford, OR 97501  
Phone: (541) 776-6010  
Fax: (541) 776-6262  
Toll Free: (877) 823-3216

### Eastern Region Bend

475 NE Bellevue Dr  
Suite 110  
Bend, OR 97701  
Phone: (541) 388-6146  
Fax: (541) 388-8283  
Toll Free: (866) 863-6668

### Eastern Region Pendleton

700 SE Emigrant, Suite 330  
Pendleton, OR 97801  
Phone: (541) 276-4063  
Fax: (541) 278-0168  
Toll Free: (800) 304-3513

### Northwest Region N. Coast Branch

65 N Highway 101  
Suite 202  
Warrenton, OR 97146  
Phone: (503) 861-3280  
Fax: (503) 861-3259  
Toll Free: (800) 452-4011