



Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

Rebuilding After the Rowena Fire

Septic Systems and National Scenic Area Rules

Losing a home to wildfire can be extremely traumatic and rebuilding can be stressful. DEQ is coordinating with North Central Public Health Department (NCPHD) to help you navigate. Homes destroyed or damaged in the Rowena Wildfire may require special rules for excavation and development because Rowena is located in the protected area of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Older septic systems may not meet current standards and may pose a public health hazard. NCPHD will determine if your system is adequate to connect to or if repairs are needed. Here's what you need to know about permitting your septic system and rebuilding.

Steps for Rebuilding or Replacing Your Home After Wildfire

Septic system planning is one of the first steps to rebuilding after a fire. NCPHD manages the septic authorization process and permitting for Wasco and Sherman counties. An Authorization Notice is required to reconnect to an existing septic system and a septic repair permit may be required if the system is damaged or likely to pollute public waters or create a public health hazard. To help streamline the permitting process, DEQ and NCPHD recommend the following steps:

Step 1: Hazardous Waste and Debris Removal

Before your septic system can be evaluated, your property must be cleared of all hazardous and solid waste debris. Mark or rope off septic tanks, drainfields and other system parts as cleanup activities can damage your septic system. For assistance with cleanup, contact [Wasco County](#) for information and resources.

Step 2: Get a Septic System Evaluation

Hire a licensed and certified [sewage disposal service](#) to complete an Existing System Evaluation Report (ESER). Wildfire and cleanup activities can damage septic systems and the ESER provides important information about your system's condition and location. The ESER is **not an approval** to use or connect to an existing system.

Step 3: Check Your Well

If your private domestic well has been damaged or burned, contact an Oregon-licensed well driller, authorized to work on wells and water pumps. The OWRD and DEQ require wells to be set back from septic systems and other potential contamination sources. Well repairs or new wells must be coordinated with septic system planning as part of the Authorization Notice process.

Step 4: Make a Rebuilding Plan

Plan your home's footprint, number of bedrooms, and whether soil test pits may be needed. An experienced licensed and [certified septic system installer](#) can help you develop a plan. You will likely need [test pits](#) if you don't have records of soil conditions on your property, such as a site evaluation report, and any of the following:

- Your Existing System Evaluation Report shows your drainfield has failed
- You are expanding the footprint of your home or adding bedrooms
- Your drainfield is very small (50 feet or less)
- Your drainfield is close to a well (under 100 feet)
- Your drainfield is not located on your property and doesn't have an easement
- Your drainfield is located under the footprint of your home
- You have a cesspool

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800-452-4011 | TTY: 711 | deqinfo@deq.oregon.gov



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Department of Environmental Quality

Step 5: Get a Land Use Compatibility Statement (LUCS)

Apply for a [Land Use Compatibility Statement](#) from Wasco County Planning Department to confirm your plans meet land use rules. Any development on your land may require longer or multiple land use reviews, so make sure you include all excavation, septic components and proposed structures and outbuildings on your plan.

Step 6: Apply for a Septic Authorization Notice

[Submit your septic application to NCPHD](#). If your existing system was installed on or after January 1, 1974, and does not have a Certificate of Satisfactory Completion, you must apply for a [Site Evaluation](#) instead.

Step 7: Septic System Review

NCPHD will review your system. If alterations or repairs are needed for your system, you may need to submit more information or revise your land use review for NCPHD to issue a septic permit.

Step 8: Apply for Building Permits

Once your septic Authorization Notice is approved, you can then apply for building permits with Wasco County.

Questions?

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DEQ Onsite Wastewater Management Program

Please visit our [contacts page](#) to find links and contact names for local entities and the appropriate regional DEQ staff.

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