



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 submitting an application to the Calvert County Office of Inspections and Permits. The Inspections and Permits office coordinates the review process with the different county and state agencies. EH reviews building permits for properties served or to be served by an individual water supply system (well) and/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 in order to 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 the proposal and determines whether or not the existing systems are adequate to serve the existing and proposed use of the building/property. 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 ["Maryland On-site Sewage Disposal System Inspection Report"](#). We also review whether or not appropriate setbacks are maintained from wells and OSDS, including any designated or potential sewage disposal area, and the potential for the proposal to adversely affect the installation of a replacement OSDS on the property. 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 construct an addition 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 for 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. 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). In many cases where an OSDS is of an advanced age or otherwise determined by a reviewer to be necessary, the system will need to be evaluated by a licensed inspector to ensure the system is still functioning properly. If the existing OSDS is found to be adequate, EH will approve the building permit. It is sometimes the case that when 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 will provide guidance upon review of the building permit application if additional requirements are necessary to obtain approvals (i.e. percolation testing, surveyor site plans, etc.).

4. Will I be able to install a swimming pool in my yard?

Several agencies will have to review 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 OSDS if the proposed swimming pool site does not conflict with the setback requirements for the existing well and OSDS or designated/potential sewage disposal area. See item #8 below for setback requirements from a pool (in-ground or above-ground) to a well or OSDS. 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 proposed alterations to the sewage disposal area for a property must be done by a licensed land surveyor and submitted to EH for review/approval. Additional percolation testing may be required.

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 relocating 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 land surveyor and submitted to EH for review/approval. Additional percolation testing may be required in order to relocate the designated sewage disposal area.

6. Do I need a building permit to finish my basement and what requirements would there be from EH?

You will 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. In many cases where an OSDS is of an advanced age or otherwise determined by a reviewer to be necessary, the system will need to be evaluated by a licensed inspector to ensure the system is still functioning properly. If the system is found to be adequate, EH may approve the permit. If the system is found to be inadequate, EH will send you a letter advising you of the necessary steps that will need to be taken in order to upgrade or replace the OSDS to accommodate the proposed 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 Application"](#) to EH with the appropriate fee. We are located at 205 Main Street 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 been done already. Once the results of the site/soil evaluations are collected, EH can provide minimum specifications for the OSDS needed to serve the proposed use. If deemed necessary, those specifications may need to be sent to a licensed land surveyor to generate a site plan demonstrating that the lot is capable of supporting the sewage disposal area necessary to accommodate the proposed use. EH will review the site plans and approve them if satisfactory. A ["Sanitary Construction Permit Application"](#) will need to be submitted by your licensed septic installer of choice in order for this office to issue a permit for the upgrade/replacement OSDS. A Sanitary Construction permit may 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 determination regarding the sequence of approvals based on individual site conditions and details of the proposal.

8. What are the setback requirements from my well and OSDS to something that I want to add to my property? See table below:

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

*OSDS includes the tank, sewer line, disposal component, sewage disposal area, and designated replacement areas.

** A variance request for approval of a pool to be less than 30 feet from a drilled well (but no less than 15 feet) may be submitted to EH for review if the request includes a signed Hold Harmless Agreement.

*** A variance request for approval of a pool to be less than 25 feet (but no less than 15 feet) to an OSDS may be submitted to EH for review.

Please note, submission of any variance request does not guarantee approval.