Sewerage System Regulation Amendments - 2010

On June 25, 2010, some changes were made to the Sewerage System Regulation (via OIC 476) to enhance the system of onsite wastewater management in B.C. Regulation amendments can be reviewed in detail by consulting the "Point In Time" Regulation Content.

A summary of the changes:

1. Section 6: Allowing homeowner installation of onsite sewerage systems under the supervision of an authorized person).
2. Improved measures for preventing health hazards throughout.
3. Section 3: Ensuring consistent setback provisions in legislation addressing location of wells and sewerage systems (with allowance for variance approvals).
4. Section 7: Ensuring all training agencies go through the same ASTTBC accreditation process to ensure students achieve the required competencies. The BC Onsite Sewage Association (BCOSSA) training program will now be subject to the same accreditation process as other training agencies.

Details of the changes

1. Homeowner installations

- This amendment will allow homeowners to contribute to the installation of systems on their own property under the supervision of an authorized person.
- This amendment can help homeowners reduce their installation costs and help address shortages of trained professionals which may exist in a given area.
- The Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) supported this amendment as a means of helping homeowners reduce onsite sewerage installation costs, while ensuring authorized person oversight.
- ASTTBC issued a bulletin to all ROWPs advising them of their supervisory responsibilities for such homeowner installations, and their accountability for signing off on these systems.

- Authorized persons continue to assume all responsibility for the system being installed. They are expected to oversee the work performed by homeowners and are required to sign the letter of certification to be filed with the Health Authority.

2. Health hazard provision

- In 2.1(1)(d) health officers are specifically authorized – but not required - to take health hazard abatement measures respecting planned onsite sewerage systems to protect public health if warranted.
- As the regulatory body for ROWPPs), ASTTBC has the duty to uphold and protect the public interest respecting the practices of their registrants. If a health officer determines that the professional conduct or behaviour of an ASTTBC registrant gives rise to a concern, the health officer is encouraged to contact ASTTBC's registrar regarding the concern, and the possibility of lodging a complaint against the ASTTBC registrant where appropriate.

3. Setback distances between Sewerage Systems/Holding tanks and drinking water wells

- The minimum setback distance requirements outlined in Section 3.1 require:
    - 30 meters between wells which supply a domestic water system and sewerage systems (which includes septic tanks), and
    - 15 meters between wells and holding tanks.
- This setback provision applies to the construction of new systems for which there was no filing before June 25, 2010. It does not apply to systems that were legally constructed before June 25, 2010, or to systems that had filings submitted to the Health Authority before June 25, 2010.
- This setback distance is now consistent with the Health Hazards Regulation (*Public Health Act)* which require that wells be located 100 feet (30 metres) from a probable source of contamination (e.g. septic fields/septic tanks).
- Setback from Holding Tanks
    - distances are less for holding tanks because they are completely contained and periodically pumped out, reducing risk to drinking water wells.
    - Holding Tanks are considered to be a 'last resort' for residential lots which are either small or lack the soil structure and depth needed to support a disposal area.

    - The 15 meter setback for holding tanks enables development on lots where a septic tank/field system is not an option. They are not commonly utilized in BC.
- Setback from Septic tanks/fields
    - In contrast, septic tanks and fields discharge a significant volume of effluent to the environment, particularly households occupied on a year-round basis.
- BC has varied geologic conditions, including the presence of fractured bedrock terrain, and there is risk that untreated septic tank effluent from a compromised septic tank may impact groundwater and drinking water wells. Thus, a 30 meter setback is set as the standard to bring the regulation in line with the Public Health Act regulations on well location (while allowing for variances).
- Flexibility is allowed through a variance provision: a professional hydrogeologist can authorize different setbacks where warranted due to the specific characteristics of a site, such as the soil conditions or slope between a sewerage system and a well.

4. Practitioner Education

- As the authorized persons who sign off onsite sewerage system plans and installations, ROWP must meet the training requirements of the Sewerage system Regulation.
- BC Onsite Sewage Association (BCOSSA) was specifically named as a training agency in the Regulation. This was an anomaly because other training agencies in BC were required to have their training programs accredited by the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC).
- Specific reference to BCOSSA has been removed and all training agencies will be subject to the same ASTTBC program accreditation process. This promotes consistency in training standards and encourages training from a variety of sources rather than specified agencies.