

# Requirements for Cottage Food Operations Using Septic Systems

## General Recommendations

- Minimize the amount sugars, fats, oils, or grease entering your septic system by scraping and wiping utensils and surfaces prior to washing and avoid washing food scraps down the drain.
- Have your septic tank pumped at the recommended frequency, once every 3-5 years or more frequently based on use.
- If you have a nonstandard system under an operational permit with our office, you should have your system maintained according to the requirements in the terms and conditions of your septic operational permit.

## Septic Systems and Cottage Foods Operations

A cottage food operation may increase the volume and/or strength of the wastewater depending on the type of business operation. Residential septic systems are designed for the wastewater flow typically associated with normal day to day use of the occupants, such as laundry, kitchen use and bathing.

Depending on the type of the cottage food operation, some can have high uses of sugar, fats, oils or grease that may be washed down the drain as a result from cooking, baking or cleaning associated with operation. The higher waste strength and increased water use can cause the septic system to perform poorly or fail, which can then lead to needing a repair or replacement septic system that can be costly.

It is important to maintain your septic system and have the septic tank inspected and pumped on a recommended 3-5 year interval or regular basis based on use.

For both Class A and B Cottage Food Operations, [applications can be obtained through Environmental Health](#). Environmental Health will review and approve the application.

## Self-Certification

The septic system to be utilized will need to be self-certified by the applicant that the following requirements are met:

1. Provide a record showing the septic system type.
  - Cesspools are prohibited.
  - Nonstandard system types, applicant must provide two monitoring and maintenance records (1 year), showing the system is operational. Nonstandard systems need to adhere to the terms and conditions of the operational permit for gallons per day of effluent allowed. The flow information should be included on the monitoring forms.
  - Septic systems with variances, should be in compliance with the terms of the variance

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including but not limited to the flows allowed under the permit.

2. The septic system is functioning and not in obvious failure, i.e., surfacing effluent, effluent backing up into the home or slow draining sinks, showers and bathtubs.
3. Provide a plot plan showing the location of the, home, septic system (septic tank and dispersal field) and water well.

Records may be available at Permit Sonoma, which can provide information regarding your septic system type and location. The following are resources for obtaining county records:

- [Online access](#)
- [Records request through email](#)
- In person at [Permit Sonoma](#) located at 2550 Ventura Ave, Santa Rosa, CA 95403
- [Assessor's Office](#) located at 585 Fiscal Drive #104F, Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Note: If there are no records available you may want to hire a Qualified Septic Consultant to complete a Findings Report.

### Graywater Systems

Graywater systems cannot be utilized for cottage food operations. Food processing wastewater, like wastewater from kitchen sinks, is considered “black” water and cannot be routed to a graywater dispersal system.

The California Plumbing Code Chapter 16A excludes wastewater from kitchens from the definition of graywater. Graywater is defined as *“untreated wastewater that has not been contaminated by any toilet discharge. Graywater includes wastewater from bathtubs, showers, bathroom sinks, clothes washing machines and laundry sinks. It does not include wastewater from kitchen sinks, dishwashers, photo lab sinks or laundry water from soiled diapers.”*