



SEO Information and Guidelines During COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Declaration

May 6, 2020

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), along with all Commonwealth agencies, has closed its offices in response to the novel coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) in the U.S. and Pennsylvania. Employees are generally teleworking from home and are continuing to provide service and assistance to the regulated community and public, although some delays may be expected. Governor Wolf has also ordered non-life sustaining businesses to close and certain residents to remain at home, with exceptions.

The regulated community is encouraged to check www.dep.pa.gov/Pages/AlertDetails.aspx (DEP’s Alert Details website) periodically for general updates from DEP during the pandemic.

If you have questions concerning whether your business is authorized to continue to operate during the emergency declaration, please visit the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development’s (DCED’s) website at <https://dced.pa.gov>.

Nothing in this document affects regulatory requirements. The interpretations herein are not an adjudication or a regulation. There is no intent on the part of DEP to give the interpretations in this document that weight or deference. This document provides a framework within which DEP will exercise administrative discretion in the future. DEP reserves the discretion to deviate from the interpretations in this document if circumstances warrant.

For non-emergency notifications related to Act 537 and sewage facilities planning (i.e., where there is no immediate threat to human health or the environment), or specific questions related to the Sewage Enforcement Officer (SEO) program, you may e-mail DEP at one of the following e-mail accounts:

DEP Office	Email Contact
Southeast Regional Office	RA-EPSEOCWPLANNING@pa.gov
Northeast Regional Office	RA-EPNEROCWPLANNING@pa.gov
Southcentral Regional Office	RA-EPSCOCWPLANNING@pa.gov
Northcentral Regional Office	RA-EPNCOCWPLANNING@pa.gov
Southwest Regional Office	RA-EPSWOCWPLANNING@pa.gov
Northwest Regional Office	RA-EPNWOCWPLANNING@pa.gov
Planning Section (Central Office)	RA-EPRCSOBCWPLANNING@pa.gov
SEO Program (Central Office)	RA-seotrng@pa.gov

For emergency notifications, you should contact DEP using one of the contact numbers on DEP's Report and Incident website at www.dep.pa.gov/About/ReportanIncident/Pages/default.aspx.

DEP expects that local agencies and SEOs continue fulfilling their duties as provided in Act 537 and its implementing regulations in a manner that is safe for those involved with conducting septic tank pump outs, operation and maintenance activities, and repairs of on-lot systems, as long as it does not run counter to orders issued by the governor or your local officials. In these challenging times it is of paramount importance that we continue to do our best to effectively treat water and wastewater including on-lot sewage treatment and disposal to ensure continued protection of human health and the environment.

SEO Certification Renewal

Given the limitations during the COVID-19 emergency, the end of the current SEO certification renewal cycle will be extended until September 30, 2020. SEOs whose certification is set to expire on June 30, 2020, will have additional time to acquire the continuing education credits they need for this cycle and to submit their renewal fee. The affected SEOs will have their next renewal cycle start on October 1, 2020, and end on September 30, 2022.

Considerations for On-lot Sewage System Providers

On-lot sewage system service providers that conduct septic tank pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs, are commonly exposed to untreated wastewater that contains disease-causing organisms. On-lot sewage system providers are unlikely to know whether wastewater from the system they are pumping, maintaining, or repairing contains COVID-19. COVID-19 concentrations and survival in feces, sewage or wastewater are currently unknown.

Guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), <https://www.osha.gov/>, states there is no evidence to suggest that additional COVID-19 specific protections are needed for employees in wastewater management operations, and OSHA encourages workers to follow routine practices to prevent exposure to wastewater. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://www.cdc.gov/>, notes that wastewater and sewage workers should use standard practices of basic hygiene precautions (e.g. handwashing) and wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) as prescribed for current work tasks. In consultation with local health officials, on-lot sewage system service providers should consider the following routine disease prevention practices for on-lot sewage system pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs to help protect service providers from potential infection of COVID-19.

PRIOR to COVID-19 Detection in your community

- Use physical barriers to prevent exposure to splashes or sprays of wastewater.
- Wear appropriate PPE: eye protection (goggles, face mask, or face shield), liquid repellent coveralls, and gloves.
- Be trained on how to properly put on, use, wear, take off, clean/disinfect, maintain, store, and dispose of PPE.
- Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds immediately after handling waste or sewage, before touching your face, before eating or drinking, and before and after using the toilet.
- Avoid touching face, mouth, eyes, nose, and open sores and cuts while handling sewage.
- Remove work clothes before eating and eat in designated areas.

- Do not chew tobacco or gum.
- Cover open sores, cuts, and wounds with clean dry bandages.
- Remove work clothes before leaving the worksite.

ONCE COVID-19 IS DETECTED in the community (low to high severity)

Once COVID-19 is detected in a community, health department recommendations addressing any change in normal operations will depend on a number of factors such as the number of cases detected, the severity of illness associated with those cases and how widespread infection is or is predicted to be based on case histories. Assessing these and other factors will help the health department determine the severity of the situation, which will help with recommendations. Unless otherwise instructed by local officials, on-lot sewage system service providers should continue to implement routine disease prevention practices for on-lot sewage system pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs.

AFTER a COVID-19 event in your community

Once concern about COVID-19 has subsided, on-lot sewage system service providers are encouraged to continue using routine disease prevention practices for on-lot sewage system pump outs, operation and maintenance, and repairs. On-lot sewage system service providers are commonly exposed to untreated wastewater that contains many different disease-causing organisms, and these routine practices are necessary to help protect service providers from potential infection.