King County Environmental Health Division Existing Policy and Procedures Technical Memorandum

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Subject:	Gravity OSS Self-check Program
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1. Summary

Public Health—Seattle and King County (PHSKC) proposes to implement a voluntary pilot "Septic Self-check" Program to support property owners in routine inspections of pumpless gravity on-site sewage/septic system (OSS). This program will be used as an educational tool for property owners to learn and inspect their own system and help property owners know what to expect when hiring an on-site system maintainer (OSM). The pilot program will be implemented for Vashon-Maury Island due to the Marine Recovery Area focus on the island, the island's status as a Critical Aquifer Recharge Area, and the high-risk of unmaintained OSS on public health.

The Septic Self-check Program is limited to permitted pumpless gravity systems with a record drawing on file, which must be inspected every 3 years (BOH 13.60.010; chapter 246-272A WAC). To ensure the functionality of the OSS, properties that participate in the program will get their systems inspected by an OSM every 6 years insead of 3 years, as inspections by a property owner and OSM will alternate. Also, this program will not replace inspection by an OSM in such situations when inspection is required for a real estate transfer, building application, commercial property inspection, community OSS inspection, or Marine Recovery Area maintenance). King County Board of Health (KCBOH) code Title 13 specifies that all OSS inspections performed in the Marine Recovery Area must be completed by a certified maintainer (13.60.010.F). This pilot program will generate experience and data necessary to evaluate whether the Septic Self-Check Program can be expanded to include Marine Recovery Area inspections upon amendment of KCBOH Title 13.

Property owners will be qualified for the program after completing a training course and quiz that will be hosted by PHSKC annually. The pilot program is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Estuary Program (NEP) through the Washington State Department of Health – additional funding sources must be identified to continue providing this service.

2. Definitions

- **DOH:** Department of Health
- **MRA:** Marine Recovery Area
- **OSM:** On-site system maintainer
- **OSS: On-site sewage/septic system**
- **PHSKC:** Public Health-Seattle and King County

3. Requirements

- Eligibility criteria
  - Systems on Vashon-Maury Island only. Systems within MRA will be qualified upon amendment of KCBOH Title 13.
  - Gravity system with no pump
  - Record drawing on file (check at www.kingcounty.gov/SepticRecords)

    - System permitted by PHSKC at the time of installation
    - No more than 2 separate connections to the residential OSS (e.g. single-family residence and accessory dwelling unit, single family residence and barn, etc.)
    - System was inspected by an OSM within the last 6 years prior to the application to the program.
    - Septic tank lids are not be required to be eligible for the self-check program. However, installing a riser would be highly recommended for homeowners for regular and routine inspections to be conducted. The importance of having a riser will be highlighted in the training.
- Frequency
    - A property owner and OSM alternate the system inspection every 3 years.
    - An inspection by a certified on-site system maintainer will be required every 6 years. Additional inspections by OSMs are encouraged when necessary.
- A property owner may only inspect the OSS on their own property, not for other properties.
- A Septic Self-check may NOT be used for the following purposes
    - Real estate transfer ("Time of Sale" inspection)
    - Building application
    - Commercial properties (e.g., food facilities, pet businesses, small businesses)
    - Community OSS
    - Marine Recovery Area (potentially allowed upon BOH 13.60.010.F amendment)

  For these purposes, these systems must be inspected every 1-3 years by a certified OSM at the required frequency per KCBOH Title 13.
- Per KCBOH 13.20.040.D, a resident owner of a single-family residence may perform minor repairs for gravity OSS.

4. Training

Property owners who wish to participate in the Septic Self-check Program will apply for the program, attend a training course, pass a quiz, and receive resources from PHSKC.

- When property owners are interested in doing Septic Self-checks, they will apply for participation in the program. A PHSKC inspector will review their information and confirm that their property meets eligibility requirements for the program.
- PHSKC will provide an annual training.
    - On-site training about how to inspect a gravity system with no pump. Details about on-site training in VMI will be updated on website, www.kingcounty.gov/septic/selfcheck
    - How to tell if the septic tank needs to be pumped
    - Watch the Septic 101 class and Septic 201 class
    - Take the quiz and get a passing grade (passing grade is at or over 70% correct answers)
    - Get a certification via email when successfully completed with the training
    - Training will NOT include information about minor repairs. Property owners should only complete minor repairs if they have sufficient expertise to complete the repair without damaging the OSS.

5. Reporting

- Within 30 days after a property owner completes the inspection, they are required to submit the self-check report to PHSKC. The report will ask the following questions:
    - Date of inspection
    - Individual who completed the inspection

    - Sludge level
    - Scum level
    - Does the tank need to be pumped?
    - Was the outlet baffle filter cleaned?
    - Are the tank lids secure after the inspection?
    - Does your OSS have any signs of failure?
    - Photo of inlet baffle, outlet baffle, secured tank lids, and drainfield area
    - Additional questions from "DIY Septic Inspection Checklist" by DOH.

- Use of reporting
    - A property owner will receive a PDF copy of the report upon submission. The property owner is responsible for saving a copy of the report for future reference.
    - The report will not to be uploaded on OnlineRME and is not available for public view.
        - The report will be stored within PHSKC OSS Program internally and only be available between the property owner and OSS Program staff unless disclosure is required under the state's Public Records Act in response to a public records disclosure request. Reports or copies of reports kept on file by PHSKC are subject to disclosure in response to public records requests, but certain kinds of personal information, if included in a report, may be exempt from disclosure and redacted by our public records response team before the report is provided to a requester.
    - The report will not be used as a means of tracking system performance nor be used as a reminder system for inspections.
    - The report does not replace an inspection report when an inspection is required by a certified OSM (see "Not eligible for purposes such as")
- Any necessary repairs or maintenance services must be completed when suspected or identified from the self-check. Contact an OSM for repairs or maintenance. PHSKC will provide resources to respond to cases when repairs or failures may be identified and follow-up is needed by a certified OSM.
- Upon property owners' request, PHSKC will provide a dye packet to do a visual dye test to determine whether sewage leaks out of the system. This will be provided at no cost as long as supplies last.

6. Questions and Support

- Property owners with questions or concerns about their system can consult with various resources:
    - Septic Expert of the Day phone line (Leave a voicemail and PHSKC staff will return the call within 48 hours)
    - PHSKC OSS Program website
    - Vashon Community Septic Team website, newsletter, social media for information on OSS maintenance and Island-specific information

7. Pilot Plan

1) Septic Self-check Program will initially be implemented as a pilot program to slowly advertise and gain support from residents as well as evaluate program effectiveness and feasibility.

Timeline:

- Pilot program will run for 1 year after the program starts.
- At the 10-month mark after the start of the program, PHSKC staff will evaluate the program based on the internal criteria. During this evaluation on the program, PHSKC staff will assess resource allotment, including but not limited to aspects of staff time, materials, training preparation and implementation, report management, etc.(see table below for "Programmatic Time"). Based on the evaluation, PHSKC staff will revise any implementation parts of the program if needed.
- At 1-year mark after the start of the program, if program can be continued, PHSKC staff will promote the program officially through various community partners and networks.

2) Evaluation criteria

Septic Self-check Program will be evaluated based on the following criteria ("Evaluation criteria"). The result of the evaluation will provide useful information to revise or improve the program ("Action").

Table 1. Evaluation criteria for Septic Self-check Program

Category	Evaluation criteria	Action
Annual training	How many people attended the annual training?	Promoting the program to property owners who may be in need of self-check
Quiz passing	What is the ratio of people who received training and passed the quiz?	Review and align training materials and test questions
Materials that may include sludge/scum sticks	After the training, will the owner be able to utilize given materials or instructions to complete the self-check?	Provide materials while funding allows and lasts. Provide detailed instructions to how materials can be self-made and used for the self-check program.
Self-check reporting form	How complete is reporting? (Complete if answered more than 80% of report questions)	Check the clarity of reporting questions (e.g., wording, examples)
Level of Action Taken	How many people who attended the training completed and reported an inspection?	Revise training content and support materials to promote additional inspections. If inspections are completed at a low rate, program may not be effective in reaching the intended goal.
Issues Identified	How many reports identified an issue? Of those, how many resulted in the appropriate steps taken to address the issue?	If inspections result in issues being addressed incorrectly, additional support may be necessary or the program may be ineffective in reaching the intended goal.
Programmatic Time	How many hours did PHSKC staff spend implementing the program?	Ensure that sufficient resources are in place to support the program if it is recommended to be continued after the first pilot

		year.

3) Program expansion:

Once the pilot program evaluation is complete, PHSKC will determine if/how the Septic Self-check Program will be expanded to other areas outside Vashon-Maury Island. The improved program after incorporating Evaluation Actions (Table 1. Evaluation criteria for Septic Self-check Program) will be promoted to other King County areas, according to feasibility criteria. This feasibility criteria will be used to help PHSKC promote the Self-check Program in a phased manner.

Feasibility criteria:

a) Community interest: Is there community interest or support related to OSS maintenance (e.g., Community Septic Team (CST), community-based organizations that have worked with PHSKC, community network that has worked with PHSKC in the past, etc.)?

b) Community interest and community needs: High community interest will bring success and momentum to the Septic Self-check Program. Therefore, PHSKC will focus on promoting and implementing the program in high-interest areas and then high-need areas in succession. Such a phased approach will ensure the program securely supports property owners and provides feedback and improvement throughout implementation.

   a. Community interest: Which communities are interested in gravity septic self-check? Communities in high interest areas will likely show more interest and maintenance completed at a frequency close to the state requirement (3 years for pumpless gravity system). Criteria for identifying high-need areas will include but not be limited to the following:
      - Number of pumpless gravity systems;
      - Routine inspection completed within the past 10 years; and
      - Geographic risk: Areas where OSS failure may be of significant impact to public health and environment (near lake, waterfront, sole-source aquifer, or within a Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) Program area or Shellfish Protection District (SPD) area).
   b. Community needs: Which communities are in need of gravity septic inspection? Identifying criteria may include the following:
      - Area median income
      - English language proficiency
      - Level of infrastructure development and changes