

**SANITATION WELCOMES INPUT ON PROPOSED ORDINANCE GOVERNING OWTS  
(ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS, OR SEPTIC TANKS)**

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**LOS ANGELES (July 30, 2010)**—The City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Bureau of Sanitation (BOS) is proposing an ordinance to govern onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS), commonly known as septic tanks. The ordinance is still in draft form, and BOS is offering stakeholders the opportunity to weigh in before anything is finalized. BOS will hold three listening sessions in early August, and all are welcome. Two sessions will take place at BOS' Media Center offices, located at 2714 Media Center Drive, Los Angeles, 90065 on Tuesday, August 3 from 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. and on Thursday, August 12 from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. There will also be an evening session on Tuesday, August 10 from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. at Council District 2's Sunland-Tujunga Field Office - 7747 Foothill Blvd., Tujunga, 91042. Other evening sessions will be scheduled later in the month in other parts of the City.

Proper maintenance and regular pumping are vital to avoiding septic system backups and expensive repairs. A failing system is not only unpleasant due to overflow to the ground surface or the plumbing in the home backing-up, but it is a human health risk and a hazard to the environment.

BOS' mission is to protect public health and the environment, and one of its essential responsibilities is compliance with state and federal mandates. The City of Los Angeles entered into a five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region in 2005. As part of that agreement, the City is required to have an ordinance addressing OWTS in place by December 31, 2010.

Without the MOU, the Regional Board can apply general Waste Discharge Requirements for each residence with OWTS. The WDRs would require each homeowner to file a "Report of Waste Discharge" (ROW), essentially proving that their septic systems work properly, protect the public's health and do not pollute any waters of the State. By easing administrative issues and lightening the burden on homeowners, the City intends to act as a buffer between the State and residential OWTS.

BOS has been conducting extensive public outreach over the past several months—presenting at more than 30 community meetings Citywide and sending information to all OWTS owners. As a result of the feedback received thus far, BOS has made significant revisions to the proposed ordinance.

At the most basic level, the proposed OWTS ordinance will help BOS take inventory. BOS has

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identified approximately 12,000 OWTS in the City, but this will provide confirmation and at the same time ask owners to indicate that they are caring for their systems properly. This will involve self-certification, and the registration would be good for five years. While nothing is final, the fee will be minimal, or registration might be free. This will apply to the vast majority of OWTS in Los Angeles.

Based on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) and the State Water Resources Control Board's most recent list of impaired water bodies as defined by the 303(d) list of the Clean Water Act, there are approximately 300 OWTS in high-risk areas, which means they are either within 900 feet of active water wells or within 600 feet of impaired water. Additional properties and areas along Santa Monica Bay in the Pacific Palisades area may be included as part of the high-risk areas as part of the City's compliance with water quality mandates for bacteria in Santa Monica Bay. The proposed ordinance would require OWTS owners in high-risk areas to obtain operating permits every three years, and would require a certified inspection upon permit renewal. The cost for the OWTS permit in high-risk areas is currently being evaluated to ensure full cost recovery. BOS estimates that each three-year permit would cost \$350, or an annual cost of about \$117.

The proposed ordinance will not require OWTS owners to connect to the sewer or to upgrade to advanced treatment OWTS. However, the City's Municipal Code already mandates that property owners connect to the sewer system if their septic system fails and/or requires replacement [LAMC 94.101.15.2] and a sewer is available within 200 feet of the structure [LAMC 94.713.4].

Residents should be aware that Assembly Bill 885 (passed in September 2000) directs the State Water Resources Control Board to develop standards for the permitting and operation of onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems. These statewide standards were supposed to become effective in 2004, but they have been undergoing a long stakeholder review and revision process. As part of previous drafts of Assembly Bill 885 regulations, mandates to connect to sewers in high-risk areas were considered. Nothing has been decided at this time, but updates can be viewed at the California Water Resources Control Board website [www.swrcb.ca.gov](http://www.swrcb.ca.gov) (Septic-Programs-New Draft OWTS Regulations).

BOS operates and maintains 6,700 miles of sewers and serves a population of more than four million people, 29 contract agencies, 100,000 businesses and industrial users located within a 525 square mile service area. The Department of Public Works is responsible for construction, renovation and operation of public facilities and infrastructure including: municipal buildings and treatment facilities; streets, street lights, and the urban forest; bridges and sidewalks; sewers, catch basins and storm drains; recycling and integrated solid waste management.