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New septic system rule takes effect: ISDS-out, OWTS-in

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Forget "individual sewage disposal system" (ISDS). As of January 1st, it will be "onsite wastewater treatment system" (OWTS).

That's one change in the Dept. of Environmental Management's new rules for septic systems that took effect on the first of the year. ISDS is being replaced by OWTS "to better emphasize the importance of treatment in system function and environmental protection," a DEM statement said.

The new rules "update technical standards for the siting and design of septic systems, improve treatment for environmental protection and public health, increase protection of water resources, streamline the permitting process, and reformat the rules to follow the sequence of actions taken in permitting a septic system in Rhode Island," the statement continued.

Among the technical changes are revisions to design standards to ensure what DEM considers the best treatment in soil dispersal trenches, higher performance standards for septic systems in salt pond watersheds and on small lots with drinking-water wells, and increased setbacks between large systems and drinking-water wells.

"The revisions were developed in conjunction with a diverse group of stakeholders. The stakeholder group included representatives from the building community, licensed septic system professionals, environmental organizations, municipal government, the University of Rhode Island, and state and federal agencies. In addition, DEM held five public workshops throughout the state before holding a public hearing on the amendments in September."

For a summary of the rule changes, visit www.dem.ri.gov/pubs/regs/regs/water/owtssum.pdf or e-mail Ernest Panciera at ernie.panciera@dem.ri.gov.

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