



Fact Sheet

Water Quality Control Policy for Siting, Design, Operation and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems and Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements

General Information

What is regulated?

Onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) commonly known as septic systems that primarily treat domestic wastewater and employ subsurface disposal. It is estimated that there are over 1 million OWTS in California.

Who are affected?

- OWTS owners
- Local agencies that permit OWTS (county environmental health departments, etc.)
- Regional Water Boards
- State Water Board

When did it take effect?

The Water Quality Control Policy for Siting, Design, Operation and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems and Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge (Policy) went into effect May 13, 2013. By law, conditional waivers expire five years after adoption. The Policy conditional waiver was renewed by the State Water Board in 2018, 2023, and will require renewal again April 2028.

Why was the Policy adopted?

Assembly Bill 885 was adopted in 2000, and it amended California Water Code Section 13290, requiring the State Water Board to develop statewide water quality standards or regulations for permitting and operating OWTS. The Policy allows the continued use of OWTS, while protecting water quality and public health through a tiered risk-based approach for regulation and management of OWTS installations and replacements, while recognizing the effectiveness of local agency OWTS permitting.

Additional Resources

More information can be found on the public Policy webpage:

<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/owts>



Information about finding potential OWTS funding sources can be found at the following wastewater funding webpage:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/wastewater/wastewater_funding.html

Questions can be emailed to: DWQ-WDR@Waterboards.ca.gov (*This Fact Sheet was last updated on May 21, 2024*)