



## Board for Waterworks and Wastewater Works Operators and Onsite Sewage System Professionals

### Guidance Document: Pumping of Alternative Onsite Sewage Systems

Adopted January 19, 2017  
Amended April 20, 2017

#### I. Background

Board staff has received inquiries regarding the necessity of an alternative onsite sewage system operator to be present when a conventional onsite system operator has been called to pump an alternative onsite sewage system. Currently, a conventional onsite sewage system operator is not permitted to perform any kind of operation and maintenance on alternative onsite sewage systems, to include pumping the tanks.

18VAC160-20-10 of the Board's regulations provides the following definitions:

**"Alternative onsite sewage system operator"** means an individual licensed by the board to operate and maintain conventional and alternative onsite sewage systems.

**"Conventional onsite sewage system operator"** means an individual licensed by the board to *operate* and *maintain* a conventional onsite sewage system.

**"Maintenance"** or **"maintain"** means performing adjustments to equipment and controls and in-kind replacement of normal wear and tear parts such as light bulbs, fuses, filters, pumps, motors, or other like components. ***Maintenance includes pumping the tanks*** or cleaning the building sewer on a periodic basis. Maintenance shall not include replacement of tanks, drain field piping, distribution boxes, or work requiring a construction permit and a licensed onsite sewage system installer.

**"Operate"** means any act of an individual that may impact on the finished water quality at a waterworks, the plant effluent at a wastewater works, or the effluent at an onsite sewage system.

In addition, the Board has the following policies and interpretations relative to this issue:

December 2, 2009 - Onsite Sewage System Operators (Septic Pumpers) An onsite sewage system operator license is required for pumping out conventional and alternative onsite sewage systems.

April 12, 2011 - Alternative Onsite Sewage System Operators (Septic Pumpers) Alternative septic tanks must have a licensed alternative onsite sewage system operator responsible for the actions of the individual or individuals pumping out the septic tank. The licensed alternative onsite sewage system operator is not required to be present when the septic tank is pumped out, but is responsible for the actions of the **unlicensed individual** actually pumping out the septic tank. The individual actually pumping out the septic tank need not be a licensed alternative onsite sewage system operator, but must be working under the supervision of a licensed alternative onsite sewage system operator who shall be responsible for the **unlicensed person's** actions, as related to pumping the septic tank.

## II. Issues and Concerns

The conventional onsite sewage system operator has the truck and equipment necessary to pump an onsite sewage system, and an alternative operator may not. In this case, the alternative onsite sewage system operator must have a conventional onsite sewage system operator pump the alternative onsite sewage system. Thus, the alternative operator must be present – because he is responsible for operation and maintenance on the alternative system – along with the conventional operator. The homeowner is then paying for two different licensees to be present, even though the conventional operator is **only** pumping the tank. *Note: Neither of the policies above address this issue, and the above policies are expected to be repealed when the new regulations are effective as the issue of supervision is addressed more clearly.*

## III. Policy

The Board adopts the following policy as it pertains to conventional onsite sewage system operators pumping alternative onsite sewage systems:

A conventional onsite sewage system operator with the appropriate sewage handling permit issued by VDH may pump an alternative onsite sewage system without the alternative onsite sewage system operator present so long as it is done at the direction of the alternative onsite sewage system operator. The conventional onsite sewage system operator is only permitted to pump the tanks and is not authorized to perform any other functions associated with operation and maintenance of the alternative onsite sewage system, and such conventional operator may only pump the tank of the alternative onsite sewage system at the request of a properly licensed alternative onsite sewage system operator. If it is found that the conventional onsite sewage system operator has performed

any function outside of pumping the alternative onsite sewage system, or has done so independently and not at the direction of an alternative onsite sewage system operator, the conventional onsite sewage system operator may be subject to disciplinary action by the Board.

The Board advises that as a best practice the alternative operator *should* be present during the pumping of the alternative onsite sewage system, or should inspect the system as soon as possible after pumping to ensure the proper continued operation of the alternative onsite sewage system in accordance with applicable regulations and manufacturer's instructions.