Application Guide

Established in 1978, the Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Replacement or Rehabilitation Financial Assistance Program provides financial incentives to protect public health, safety, and the waters of the state. Since its inception the program has awarded over $77 million in grants for nearly 34,400 residences and businesses to replace or rehabilitate failing private systems statewide.

As part of this program, Wisconsin counties, Indian tribes, and municipalities within Milwaukee County may apply to the Department of Commerce (Commerce), Safety and Buildings Division, for grants to assist owners of principal residences (PR) and small commercial establishments (SCE) in rehabilitating or replacing a failing private system. This publication explains how the program works and who is eligible for financial assistance.

The program is voluntary. As of January 2005, most counties, the City of Franklin within Milwaukee County, and the Oneida Tribe are participating. The counties of Ashland, Crawford, Douglas, and Florence currently do not participate.

You may be eligible for a grant under this program, if ALL of the following requirements are met:

- You reside in a governmental unit that is participating in the program.
- A state or governmental unit employee verifies that you have a failing system before replacement begins.
- Your PR or SCE is not located in an area served by a municipal system.
- The system serving your PR or SCE was constructed prior to July 1, 1978.
- The family income of all owners of the PR is less than $45,000 or the gross revenue of the SCE is less than $362,500. (Grant awards for PRs are reduced by $.30 for each $1.00 earned over $32,000.)
- Your PR or SCE is served by a category 1 or 2 failing system.
- The PR or SCE is occupied 51% of the year by the owner.
- The SCE is operated by the owner and has a daily wastewater flow rate less than 5,000 gallons per day.
- Your application is submitted within three years from the date of the verification of failure.

When is the Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Considered Failing?

When properly operating, a system safely treats wastewater by storing sludge and solids in the septic tank and by treating and dispersing wastewater in a soil absorption field. However, a failing system can harm the environment by discharging sewage to the surface, to a lake or stream, or to groundwater. Your system may not show any apparent signs of failure and yet be failing.

The types of failing private onsite wastewater treatment systems are divided into three categories:

Category 1 systems are those which fail by discharging sewage to surface water, groundwater, drain tiles, bedrock or zones of seasonally saturated soils. These are considered the most serious types of failure, and are given highest priority for grant assistance.

Category 2 systems are those which fail by discharging sewage to the surface of the ground. This type of failing system is eligible for a grant but has a lower priority for funding than Category 1 systems.

Category 3 systems are those which fail by causing the backup of sewage into the structure served. This type of failing system is not eligible for grant assistance.

How Much Money Can I Receive?

The maximum grant is limited to the amounts listed in tables published in Comm 87, Wis. Adm. Code, or $7,000. Your participating zoning office or health department has copies of these funding tables and can explain how they are used. Amounts may vary based on the extent of the work needed to bring your system into compliance with the state plumbing code. Experimental systems are not included in the $7,000 maximum.

If the application is approved, when is the money received?

Grant funds are allocated on an annual cycle. The governmental unit submits an application to Commerce in January for all eligible individuals within their jurisdiction. Commerce makes grant awards for these applications in the following fiscal year or in the fall of each year.

If the application is denied, does the failing system still need to be corrected?

Yes. Remember, a failing private onsite wastewater treatment system is a violation of your local ordinance and state statutes and can result in water pollution and health hazards. You may be ordered to correct a violation even if your governmental unit is not participating in the program or if you are not eligible to receive financial assistance.

Wisconsin Fund grant money is not guaranteed.

If approved applications exceed available funding; Commerce is required to prioritize funds based on potential environmental harm associated with different types of system failures.

Category 1 grants are paid in full before Category 2 are eligible for any funding. If there are insufficient funds to provide payments for all Category 1 applications, these are prorated and nothing is provided for the Category 2 systems. If Category 1 applications are fully funded, remaining funds are used for Category 2 systems. If the remaining funds cannot cover all of the Category 2 applications, these grants are also prorated.

Of the funds available each year, a maximum of 10 percent are allowed for small commercial establishments and a maximum of 10 percent for experimental systems.

Who to Contact:

Questions concerning the program may be addressed to your governmental unit zoning or health department office or the Department of Commerce, Safety and Buildings Division office at 608/267-7113. Deaf, hearing or speech-impaired callers may reach us through the Wisconsin Telecommunication Relay System (WI TRS).

Wisconsin Fund -

Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Replacement or Rehabilitation Financial Assistance Program

commerce.wi.gov

Wisconsin Department of Commerce
Safety and Buildings Division

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