

Frequently Asked Environmental Health Questions

[Septic Questions](#)
[Lodging Questions](#)
[Miscellaneous Questions](#)

[Well and Water Questions](#)
[Tattoo Questions](#)

[Restaurant and Food Questions](#)
[Complaints](#)

Septic Systems & Wastewater

How do I get a septic permit?

Step 1: Fill out a septic application and submit it to your local health department. Please review this ([link here](#)) information sheet prior to submitting your application.

Well

Step 2: Before an environmental health specialist visits your lot, you will need to mark existing and proposed property lines, your proposed house site, proposed wells, etc. Your property will also need to be cleared to the extent that the environmental health specialist can see the topography of the property and note any items that the septic must meet setbacks for, such as creeks (50'), property lines (10'), etc.

Step 3: The next step will be an environmental health specialist visiting your lot. During this visit, it is helpful if the applicant can be present. It will also speed the permitting process if your selected septic installer or someone else with access to a backhoe/tracker can be there. This will allow the environmental health specialist to evaluate the soil during this visit. If a backhoe/tracker is not available for this visit, the environmental health specialist will place flags on your property to designate test pit locations.

Step 4: The environmental health specialist will evaluate the soil revealed in your test pits. Based on soil conditions, lot topography, number of bedrooms per house, etc, we will site and size the septic system and repair area. Repair area is generally 100% the size of the original system area. If lot conditions allow, an Improvement Permit and/or Construction Authorization is issued. If the soil is unsatisfactory or other lot conditions prevent issuance of a permit, the environmental health specialist will inform you of other options for the property.

Step 5: If you applied for and were issued a construction authorization, your system may be installed per the conditions on the permit. Your septic contractor will notify your local health department when the system is installed and ready for final inspection. The environmental health specialist will visit your property to insure that the system is installed per the requirements on the permit and according to applicable state rules. If the system meets these requirements, the environmental health specialist will issue an operation permit for the system. If your project is new construction, this permit will be sent to your local building department. Your local building department must have a copy of the operation permit before they allow permanent electrical service.

How long are well or septic permits valid?

Well and septic permits are typically valid for five years from the date of issuance. If you would like to know the expiration date of a specific permit, please contact your local health department.

How do I find septic or well records?

You may visit your local health department during business hours, or you can fill out a septic/well information request and fax or mail it to your local health department.

Wells & Water

How do I get a well permit? What are the steps after the well permit is issued?

Step 1: Fill out a well permit application and submit it to your local health department. Your application should include information on the characteristics of the site, such as existing or permitted sewage disposal systems, easements or rights of way, existing wells or springs, surface water or designated wetlands, chemical or petroleum storage tanks, landfills, waste storage, known underground contamination and any other characteristics or activities on the property or adjacent properties that could impact groundwater quality or suitability of the site for well construction

Step 2: Meet with an environmental health specialist on your property to determine the suitability of your proposed well location.

Step 3: If a suitable location is available, the environmental health specialist will issue a permit for the well. This permit may be picked up by the applicant at the health department. The permit can also be mailed, faxed, or emailed to the applicant and/or their selected well driller(s).

Step 4: The driller will contact an environmental health specialist for the environmental health specialist to perform a grouting inspection. This occurs during the drilling process, to insure that the well meets the Well Construction Standards for private drinking water wells.

Step 5: Once the certified pump installer or property owner installs the pump, the applicant must contact the local health department so that an environmental health specialist may inspect the completion of the well head and collect a water sample.

Step 6: Your water sample is sent to the NC State Laboratory of Public Health (NCSLPH). NCSLPH analyzes your samples and sends the to your local health department. This information is reviewed by an environmental health specialist and mailed to the address you specified on your application. The elapsed time from sampling to results being mailed to the applicant is typically 2 –3 weeks.

How can I get my drinking water sampled?

You may visit your local health department during normal business hours to fill out an application for water sampling. If you live out of town or would prefer to fax or email an application for water sampling, please contact your local health department and we will make arrangements. After we receive your application and payment for requested samples, an environmental health specialist make a visit to collect your sample(s).

What can you test for in drinking water?

We routinely test for bacteria, inorganic chemicals, nitrates/nitrites, pesticides, herbicides, and petroleum products. Detailed information about each type of sample is below.

Bacterial testing: *we test for the presence of total and fecal coliform bacteria in drinking water using Colilert present/absent analysis. This is a qualitative test that results in a negative or positive result for total and fecal coliform bacteria. If coliform bacteria are present, the water is considered unsafe for drinking purposes. An analysis refers only to the sample as collected and should not be regarded as a complete report on the water supply. Water is not examined for pathogenic bacteria, as the prospect of isolating them from water is very remote.*

Inorganic Chemical Testing: *These samples are analyzed for alkalinity, arsenic, calcium, chloride, copper, hardness, lead, iron, magnesium, manganese, pH, fluoride, and zinc. If you have concerns about other inorganic chemicals, we can additionally analyze for cadmium, chromium, mercury, selenium, silver, barium, sulfate, dissolved solids, and turbidity at no additional cost. If you wish for use to test for these optional chemicals, please note it on your water sample application. If you would like to sample for an inorganic chemical or physical property that is not list, please ask. We can sometimes make arrangements for such samples. Inorganic chemical samples are analyzed by the NC State Laboratory for Public Health. Results are typically available 2 – 5 weeks after your sample is collected.*

Pesticides: *These samples are collected after special arrangements are made with your local health department. We must know the pesticide(s) for which you want your water analyzed. Due to the complexity and cost associated with organic chemical analysis, we are not able to do broad-spectrum testing for pesticides. After you inform us of the pesticide(s) you wish to test for, we will contact the NC State Laboratory for Public Health to arrange for testing. These samples are analyzed by the NC State Laboratory for Public Health. Results are typically available 2 – 5 weeks after your sample is collected*

Herbicides: *These samples are collected after special arrangements are made with your local health department. We must know the herbicide(s) for which you want your water analyzed. Due to the complexity and cost associated with organic chemical analysis, we are not able to do broad-spectrum testing for herbicides. After you inform us of the herbicide(s) you wish to test for, we will contact the NC State Laboratory for Public Health to arrange for testing. These samples are analyzed by the NC State Laboratory for Public Health. Results are typically available 2 – 5 weeks after your sample is collected*

Petroleum Products: *These samples are collected after special arrangements are made with your local health department. We must know the petroleum product(s) for which you want your water analyzed. Due to the complexity and cost associated with organic chemical analysis, we are not able to do broad-spectrum testing for petroleum*

products. After you inform us of the petroleum product(s) you wish to test for, we will contact the NC State Laboratory for Public Health to arrange for testing. These samples are analyzed by the NC State Laboratory for Public Health. Results are typically available 2 – 5 weeks after your sample is collected

Food

How do I open a restaurant or food stand?

Step 1: Contact your local health department to discuss your plans with an environmental health specialist. The environmental health specialist will inform you of the proper application you need to complete and advise you on other aspects of your project.

Step 2: When you have completed the required application, it will be reviewed by an environmental health specialist. If your proposed establishment will utilize an on-site septic system and/or a private well, the environmental health specialist will have to determine the adequacy of the well and/or septic system for your proposed establishment.

Step 3: Once the environmental health specialist has reviewed your plans and any necessary modifications are made, you may begin construction (pending the approval of any other applicable agencies). Often, before construction or renovation begins, an environmental health specialist will visit the site of your proposed facility to look for potential issues. During the construction process, the environmental health specialist may also visit your facility to check on progress and answer any questions you may have.

Step 4: When your construction/renovation is nearing completion, it is a good idea to schedule a visit by an environmental health specialist before you order foods or other perishable supplies. This way, if there are any delays or outstanding issues, you do not run the risk of losing perishable goods.

Step 5: Once your equipment is installed, an environmental health specialist will visit to insure that your refrigeration equipment is functioning properly and all other aspects of construction meet the requirements of applicable state rules. If the environmental health specialist deems that your facility meets these requirements, you may order your food and any other perishable supplies you may need to begin operations.

Step 6: On the day before you anticipate beginning food service or the day of, an environmental health specialist will visit your facility to check food temps, and to make a final evaluation of your establishment. If all aspects of your establishment meet the applicable rules and conditions, your permit will be issued and you may begin operations.

How do I open a hot dog cart or mobile food unit?

Step 1: Contact your local health department to discuss your plans with an environmental health specialist. The environmental health specialist will inform you of the proper application you need to complete and advise you on other aspects of your project. Please be aware that a mobile food unit or hot dog cart must operate in conjunction with a permitted establishment, such as a restaurant or food stand. This establishment will act as your commissary.

Step 2: When you have completed the required application, it will be reviewed by an environmental health specialist. If the establishment that will act as your commissary is served by an on-site septic system, the environmental health specialist will have to determine the adequacy of the septic system for the additional flow required for servicing your mobile food unit or hot dog cart.

Step 3: Once the environmental health specialist has reviewed your plans and any necessary modifications are made, the environmental health specialist will examine your cart or mobile food unit. It is a good idea to do this before you order foods or other perishable supplies. This way, if there are any delays or outstanding issues, you do not run the risk of losing perishable goods. Please have the refrigeration units running and cooled to proper temperature (less than 41° Fahrenheit) in advance of this visit, so that the environmental health specialist may check your cold holding temperatures.

Step 5: If your unit and associated equipment are sufficient, the environmental health specialist will issue a permit for your hot dog cart or mobile food unit. You may then begin operating as specified on your application and permit.

Lodging

How do I open a lodging facility?

Step 1: Contact your local health department to discuss your plans with an environmental health specialist. The environmental health specialist will inform you of the proper application you need to complete and advise you on other aspects of your project.

Step 2: When you have completed the required application, it will be reviewed by an environmental health specialist. If your proposed establishment will utilize an on-site septic system and/or a private well, the environmental health specialist will have to determine the adequacy of the well and/or septic system for your proposed establishment.

Step 3: Once the environmental health specialist has reviewed your plans and any necessary modifications are made, you may begin construction (pending the approval of any other applicable agencies). Often, before construction or renovation begins, an environmental health specialist will visit the site of your proposed facility to look for potential issues. During the construction process, the environmental health specialist may also visit your facility to check on progress and answer any questions you may have.

Step 4: When your construction/renovation is nearing completion, it is a good idea to schedule a visit by an environmental health specialist to check for any last minute items that may need to be completed.

Step 5: When you have completed construction/renovation, an environmental health specialist will visit your facility. If all aspects of your establishment meet the applicable rules and conditions, your permit will be issued and you may begin operations.

Tattoos

How do I open a tattoo parlor or engage in tattooing?

Before engaging in the practice of tattooing, the tattoo artist must obtain a permit from the local health department. Contact your local health department for information about the permitting process.

Complaints

How can I file an environmental health complaint?

You may file an environmental health complaint in person at the Avery, Mitchell, or Yancey County Health Departments during normal business hours. Routine complaints must be in writing, per Toe River Health District policy. If you have a complaint that presents an imminent hazard to human health, you may call in your complaint to the appropriate county health department.

Miscellaneous

Do environmental health specialists have the authority to condemn buildings?

No, only your local building department has the authority to condemn a building. If you feel a situation warrants environmental health action, please visit your local health department to file a complaint. Routine complaints must be in writing, per Toe River Health District policy. If you have a complaint that presents an imminent hazard to human health, you may call in your complaint to the appropriate county health department.

Do environmental health specialists test for mold?

Per EPA guidelines, it is usually not necessary to conduct mold testing for routine clean-up. The EPA has very good resources pertaining to mold, which you may view at <http://www.epa.gov/mold>. If you have a mold concern, please contact your local health department, as we may be able to assist you as part of our Healthy Housing Program.

Do environmental health specialists test for radon?

You may purchase radon test kits from your local hardware store, or from <http://www.ncradon.org/diy.htm>. Our area is classified as moderate (Avery and Yancey Counties) to high risk (Mitchell County) for elevated levels of indoor radon. As indoor radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S., it is desirable to test for it in all new homes in our area. If you have an existing home that you would like tested for radon, please contact your local health department. We may be able to assist you as part of our Healthy Housing Program.

We can also test for radon, radium, and uranium in drinking water. These radioactive elements have been linked to increased risk for lung and certain other cancers. Please contact your local health department to arrange for this testing. More information is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/radon/rnwater.html>.

Who can I contact with my concerns about indoor or outdoor air quality?

The Division of Air Quality (DAQ) is the regulatory agency responsible for indoor and outdoor air quality in North Carolina. The closest regional office for DAQ is located near Asheville. You can contact them at (828)296-4500 or view the NC DAQ website at: <http://www.ncair.org/>. Complaints or concerns about asphalt plants should be directed to this agency.

Who can I contact with my concerns about water quality for rivers, creeks, streams, and other surface waters?

The Division of Water Quality (DWQ) is the regulatory agency responsible for surface water quality in North Carolina. Their closest regional office for DWQ is located near Asheville. You can contact them at (828)296-4500 or view the NC DWQ website at: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/wq>.

Who can I contact with a concern about open burning?

The Open Burning Rule is one of North Carolina's oldest air quality regulations, first adopted in 1971. The rule prohibits most outdoor burning and sets conditions for allowable fires. Under the rule, it is always illegal to burn trash and other non-vegetative materials. Leaves, branches and other plant growth can be burned under certain conditions. Violators can be fined up to \$25,000 or more. For more information, you may call the toll-free open burning hotline at: 1-877 OPEN BURN (1-877-673-6287) or visit <http://www.ncair.org/enf/openburn/>.