



*Santa Rosa County Public Information ▪ 4499 Pine Forest Road ▪ Milton, Florida ▪ 32583 ▪ (850) 983-5254*

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#100923-SB550

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***New Statewide Septic Tank Evaluation Requirement Effective January 1  
-Residents urged to learn more, contact local State Legislators-***

Florida Senate Bill 550 requiring all septic tanks in the state to be evaluated by the Florida Department of Health every five years at the property owner's expense will go into effect on January 1 unless action is taken to amend or repeal the bill. Passed into law on June 7, the environmental protection bill requires an evaluation of the septic tank and drainfields, along with an assessment of the system's overall condition. Residents will be required to pay the cost of the evaluation and an inspection fee. Some tanks will also require a tank pump out, repairs or replacement. At today's September 23 board meeting, the commission voted to pass a resolution urging the Florida Governor and legislature to take the necessary steps to rescind or repeal the amendment to S381.0065. However, residents must become educated on the ramifications of this bill and voice any opposition immediately to state leaders if they wish this bill to be amended or repealed before January 1.

The Santa Rosa County Commission is opposed to this bill, as they feel it will impose excessive and unnecessary costs to Santa Rosa County residents with fully functional septic systems, particularly those on fixed incomes. Unlike many other counties, in 2000 Santa Rosa County passed local Ordinance 2000-22, which requires inspection by the Florida Department of Health of on-site septic systems whenever a property is sold or conveyed. In addition to this inspection requirement, the ordinance limits the placement of septic systems in certain wetland areas and within certain proximity to bodies of water. The ordinance was adopted by Santa Rosa County after extensive public debate and input from state and federal resources on local soil classifications and the effectiveness of septic systems within those classifications. Senate Bill 550 does not take into account soil type or geological differences, despite marked differences between the soil and geological conditions existing throughout our state.

Residents can follow the developments of this new inspection program by the Technical Review and Advisory Panel or TRAP, by visiting the link on the Department of Health's Bureau of Onsite Sewage Programs online at [www.doh.state.fl.us/ENVIRONMENT/ostds/trap/index.htm](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/ENVIRONMENT/ostds/trap/index.htm), or attend a TRAP public workshop. Currently there are no workshops scheduled in our area, however the commission is requesting a meeting to be held in Santa Rosa County. The two closest workshops currently scheduled are:

October 18, 9 a.m. - noon, Eastern Time  
Betty Easley Conference Center  
4075 Esplanade Way, Conference Room 152  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

October 21, 9 a.m. - noon, Central Time  
DeFuniak Springs Community Center  
361 N 10th Street  
DeFuniak Springs, Florida 32433

The Florida Department of Health has also provided the follow FAQ (available online at [www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/ostds/New.htm](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/ostds/New.htm)):

1. **When will the program start?** Notifications will begin in January 2011.
2. **I had my tank pumped out last year. Will I be exempt from the evaluation program?** The law does not exempt you from the evaluation, but tanks that have been pumped and certified within the previous five years do not have to be pumped.
3. **Will the evaluator be digging up my yard and drainfield?** The evaluator will have to uncover your tank manholes for access to pump out your tank and check that it is watertight. They will not be digging up your drainfield but will need to auger a small (4 - 6 inch) hole to determine the wettest season water table.
4. **Why the concern about separation from the wettest season water table?** Onsite systems rely on dry soil to provide treatment. Research in Florida has found that 24 inches of dry soil is needed to remove pathogens and treat your sewage to protect both your and your neighbors' health.
5. **Will I have to upgrade my system to one of the new performance based treatment systems?** No, the law does not require upgrades to performance based treatment systems.
6. **What will this cost?** The most significant cost will come if your tanks require pump out. These costs vary around the state, due primarily to disposal costs, but can range from \$150 to \$450 per tank. Pump out cost also depends on the size and number of tanks to be pumped. The evaluation cost will be set by individual evaluators, but is estimated to be in the \$150 to \$200 range, including the reporting fee that the department estimated at \$30 per system.
7. **I am on a limited income. What if I cannot afford this?** The bill establishes a grant program for low-income families. The department also proposes to allow low-income families to request a one-time, one year extension to their evaluation deadline.
8. **I live in a small, rural county. When will I have to do this?** The current proposal is to begin with a limited number of systems in all counties and phase-in the evaluations over the next five years. Evaluations would begin with those systems most recently installed and work backwards from the installation date.

Florida Legislative Contacts for Santa Rosa County:

- Senator Durrell Peaden, Jr.: (850) 484-9898
- Senator Don Gaetz: (850) 897-5747
- Representative Greg Evers: (850) 983-5550
- Representative Clay Fiord: (850) 595-5550
- Representative Matt Gaetz: (850) 833-9328

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