

SepticSmart Strategies



Strategies to Address the Problem

Existing and proposed strategies have been identified to address the problem of unapproved septic systems in Boulder County.

Current Strategies

1. **Complaint investigations identifying failing systems:** Boulder County Public Health (BCPH) staff currently conduct site visits in response to complaints of failing septic systems. When investigations identify failure, BCPH begins enforcement procedures to ensure that the failure is corrected.
2. **Land Use referrals:** Boulder County Land Use regulations require that each occupied dwelling have an approved septic system before a building permit can be issued. BCPH receives referrals from the Boulder County Land Use Department in response to applications from homeowners who wish to make changes to their properties. If BCPH identifies an unapproved septic system through a referral, the property owner is required to upgrade the septic system.

Proposed Strategies

1. **Outreach to properties with permitted systems but without final approval:** Approximately 1,043 septic systems in Boulder County have a permit but have not received final approval (meaning a final check of the septic system was never conducted). Thus, these systems cannot be approved. By categorizing these 1,043 systems over the next couple of years, BCPH can contact owners directly to let them know what they need to do to receive final approval.
2. **Direct outreach to high-risk areas:** BCPH has conducted a risk analysis of the septic systems in Boulder County and has prioritized areas of high-risk where septic systems have a greater chance for negatively impacting our water. Staff will conduct targeted outreach over a 15-year period to these high-risk areas and provide property owners with information specific to their risk and options for bringing unapproved systems up to standard. This will include community discussion about next steps in addressing the unapproved septic systems in the specific area.
3. **General education and outreach:** This strategy will include using newspaper articles, flyer distribution, website marketing, placing posters in communities, mailing of postcards, and a multitude of other strategies aimed at informing the community about the concerns of unapproved and aging septic systems. Information will include how property owners can check the status of their own systems as well as information on the permitting process.
4. **Property transfer regulation:** After researching nationally how the issue of unapproved septic systems is being addressed, BCPH discovered a common strategy is to require inspections of a property's septic systems at the time of property sale or transfer. This

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ensures that any issues with the septic system are disclosed to the new buyer, and that the existing owner or new buyer will make the repairs within 60 days of the closing date.

5. **Community identified solutions:** BCPH recognizes the vast knowledge and expertise that our community possesses. Using open houses, a website survey, and direct contact with the community, staff anticipate that additional strategies will be identified to address the issue of unapproved septic systems.
6. **Deadline:** As with many other issues there is often a compliance deadline by which date necessary corrections must be made (i.e., replacement of cedar shake roofs). The compliance deadline for approval of septic systems is December 31, 2023 (15 years). BCPH anticipates that most residents will have acted upon a strategy to help assure protection of our waters before this deadline.

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