

Commercial Food Service Wastewater Issues

In June 2012, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) adopted the Water Quality Control Policy for Siting, Design, Operation and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS Policy) for wastewater treatment systems. The OWTS Policy addresses onsite systems that primarily treat domestic wastewater and employ subsurface disposal, but it also addresses commercial food service buildings (such as restaurants) with similar wastewater treatment systems. This Fact Sheet provides guidance on simple and cost effective methods for source control at commercial food service buildings to comply with the OWTS Policy.

Historically, most small wastewater systems were permitted through a local agency - typically a county environmental health department. The OWTS Policy does not change that procedure, but certain changes in local wastewater ordinances may be required to comply with the OWTS Policy requirements. In addition, the OWTS Policy imposes some requirements that a local agency must comply with. One of those requirements affects commercial food service buildings.

OWTS Policy section 2.6 requires owners of commercial food service buildings with onsite wastewater treatment systems to apply to the Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) for waste discharge requirements (WDRs) if the wastewater system:

1. Receives wastewater with a biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) greater than 900 milligrams per liter (mg/L), or
2. Does not have a properly sized and functioning oil/grease interceptor.

Owners of these systems must comply with both requirements (and other requirements such as flow limits) to avoid having to apply for WDRs.

Best Management Practices

Commercial food service operators have several alternatives to reduce the concentration of BOD in their wastewater. Employing these relatively inexpensive best management practices is likely to maintain the BOD concentration below 900 mg/L. An operator can train employees to employ the following good work practices:

1. Scrape plates and cookware to dispose of residual food in the trash before rinsing dishes.
2. Use screens in drains to capture food waste. Maintain drains and traps as needed.
3. Minimize the use of a sink mounted garbage disposal.
4. Recycle or properly dispose of cooking oils and other food items that cannot be used, rather than pouring them down the drain.
5. Sweep and/or mop floors rather than washing spills down the drain.
6. If needed, consider installing an in-kitchen passive interceptor.

Commercial food service operators have fewer options regarding the oil/grease interceptor requirement of the OWTS Policy. An operator can:

1. Connect to a regional wastewater collection system (if possible).
2. Install a properly sized and functioning oil/grease interceptor.
3. Submit an application to the Regional Water Board for issuance of WDRs.

More information on the OWTS Policy, related documents, and contact information is available at:
<http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/owts/index.shtml>.