



Date: December 17, 2025
To: All Interested Parties
From: Nevada County Department of Environmental Health (NCDEH)
Subject: Guidance for Use of a Common Tank for a Primary Dwelling & Accessory Dwelling Unit

Background

The Nevada County Department of Environmental Health (Department) administers and enforces onsite wastewater treatment system (OWTS) requirements pursuant to the Nevada County Local Area Management Plan (LAMP) and Nevada County Code. These authorities establish standards intended to protect public health, groundwater quality, and surface waters while allowing reasonable development.

It is the Department's general position that each dwelling unit be served by a separate septic tank. Separate tanks reduce the likelihood of overloading system components and provide greater operational reliability, particularly where multiple dwellings introduce increased wastewater flows associated with separate kitchens, laundry facilities, and bathing fixtures.

At the same time, the Department recognizes the high cost of residential construction in California and the demonstrated need to support additional housing opportunities, including accessory dwelling units, in a manner that remains protective of public health and the environment. Consistent with the LAMP and Nevada County Code, Title 12, Sections 12.03.190 through 12.03.193., the Department may allow a primary dwelling and one accessory dwelling unit to share a common septic tank when specific criteria are met and adequately documented.

I. Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to establish clear and consistent criteria under which a primary dwelling and one accessory dwelling unit (ADU) may be approved to use a common septic tank, in accordance with the Nevada County Local Area Management Plan and Nevada County Code, Title 12, Sections 12.03.190 through 12.03.193.

This guidance is intended to:

- Protect public health and water quality;
- Ensure onsite wastewater systems are appropriately designed and maintained;

- Provide clarity to applicants and design professionals; and
 - Support housing development goals while maintaining regulatory compliance.
-

II. Guidelines

A. General Statement

1. The Department encourages separate septic tanks for each dwelling unit whenever feasible.
2. A common septic tank serving one primary dwelling and one ADU may be approved on a case-by-case basis when all requirements of this guidance document are satisfied and the system complies with the LAMP and Nevada County Code, [Title 12, Sections 12.03.190 through 12.03.193](#).
3. Approval of a common septic tank is not automatic and shall be based on demonstrated system adequacy and professional evaluation.

B. Eligibility and System Requirements

To qualify for use of a common septic tank serving a primary dwelling and one ADU, all of the following requirements must be met:

1. **Septic Tank Sizing**

The septic tank capacity shall be sized based on the total number of bedrooms served by both the primary dwelling and the ADU, in accordance with the septic tank sizing requirements established in the Nevada County LAMP.

2. **Tank Condition and Compliance**

The existing or proposed septic tank shall:

- Meet current construction and performance standards;
- Be demonstrated to be structurally sound and functional; and
- Be verified by a septic tank inspection report, tank report, or other method acceptable to the Department.

Where not already present, the following shall be required:

- Watertight access risers to grade; and
- An effluent filter in the outlet pipe.

3. **Professional Determination of Adequacy**

A qualified professional shall evaluate the proposed use of a common septic tank and determine that the tank and associated system components provide adequate capacity to handle the combined wastewater flow from both dwellings.

Documentation shall include one or more of the following:

- Plans stamped by the qualified professional; and
- A signed and stamped statement, letter, or certificate affirming that the proposed common septic tank will provide sufficient capacity and function appropriately for the combined use.

4. **Septic System Modification Permit Required**

- All new or modified connections to the septic tank shall be subject to inspection by Environmental Health staff prior to permit final as part of the septic modification permit.

- If the connection involves a pumped system or pump components, the pump design and installation shall also be inspected and approved by the qualified professional, with documentation provided to the Department.

5. **Finalizing the Permit**

Final approval for use of a common septic tank shall be granted only after all documentation is received, inspections are completed, and the Department determines that the system complies with this guidance, the LAMP, and applicable provisions of Nevada County Code, Title 12.

III. Definitions

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU):

A residential dwelling unit that is secondary to a primary dwelling, as defined by applicable state and local regulations.

Common Septic Tank:

A single septic tank designed and approved to receive wastewater from both a primary dwelling and one accessory dwelling unit.

Local Area Management Plan (LAMP):

The Nevada County Local Area Management Plan adopted pursuant to state law, which establishes local standards and requirements for the design, installation, operation, and maintenance of onsite wastewater treatment systems.

Primary Dwelling:

The main residential dwelling unit located on a parcel.

Qualified Professional:

A California-licensed professional authorized to design, evaluate, and certify onsite wastewater treatment systems within their scope of practice, including but not limited to registered civil engineers or other professionals recognized by the Department.

Tank Report / Septic Tank Inspection Report:

Documentation prepared by a qualified individual that evaluates the condition, functionality, and compliance of an existing septic tank.