



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

Administrative Rules, Title 11, Chapter 62, Wastewater Systems
Rationale for Prohibiting New Cesspools

Why is the Department of Health proposing the new changes to these rules?

The Department of Health is proposing that the construction of new cesspools be prohibited in order to protect public health and preserve our natural resources. Approximately 800 new cesspools are installed each year on Hawai'i Island and the islands of Maui and Molokai.

Hawai'i is the only state in the US that still allows construction of new cesspools. DOH is also proposing rules to implement the new tax credit law for upgrading qualifying existing cesspools (Act 120). DOH is not proposing to require upgrades of existing cesspools in these rules.

What are cesspools?

- Cesspools are substandard systems, little more than holes in the ground that discharge raw, untreated human waste. Cesspools don't treat wastewater, they merely dispose of it.
- Sewers and septic systems, by contrast, remove and treat most of the waste before it reaches waters.

How are cesspools harmful to the environment?

- Cesspools concentrate the untreated wastewater in one location, often near or in direct contact with groundwater.
- Cesspools release each day approximately 55 million gallons of untreated sewage into the groundwater in Hawai'i. This groundwater flows into drinking water wells, streams and the ocean, impacting beaches where thousands swim and coral reefs that protect our islands and are key to Hawaii's economy.
- Cesspools can contaminate ground water, drinking water sources, streams and oceans with disease-causing pathogens such as bacteria, protozoa and viruses that can cause gastroenteritis, Hepatitis A, conjunctivitis, leptospirosis, salmonellosis and other diseases.
- Untreated wastewater from cesspools also contains algae-causing nutrients and other harmful substances. Cesspools in Hawai'i release as much as 23,700 pounds of nitrogen and nearly 6,000 pounds of phosphorus into the ground each day each day, which can stimulate undesirable algae growth and degrade water quality.

How many cesspools do we have in Hawai'i?

- There are almost 90,000 cesspools in the State, with nearly 50,000 located on the Big Island, almost 14,000 on Kauai, over 12,000 on Maui, over 11,000 on Oahu and over 1,400 on Molokai.
- There are over 6,600 cesspools that are located near a drinking water source or within 200 feet of the shoreline, a wetland, or a perennial stream channel in Hawai'i that may qualify for an upgrade tax credit.