

Composting Toilet Guidelines

Update April 18, 2011

Composting toilets are not permitted in Butte County for residential or commercial use.

Individuals who wish to obtain a permit from Butte County Environmental Health to install a composting toilet will need to request that the Environmental Health Director approve alternative requirements to those found in the Butte County On-Site Wastewater Manual.

These guidelines provide a potential set of mitigations that would protect public health and the environment when allowing a composting toilet as an alternative to a conventional on-site wastewater systems.

(a) **Applicability.**

Composting toilets should only be considered for owner occupied dwellings on parcels 1 acre in size or larger.

(b) **Requirements.**

No person should install, use, or maintain a composting toilet, except where all of the following requirements are met:

(1) **General.**

- (A) The parcel is first shown to be capable of supporting an on-site wastewater system meeting the requirements of this chapter.
- (B) The composting toilet is installed, maintained, or replaced unless in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.
- (C) No material is placed in a composting toilet other than the material for which it has been designed.
- (D) Installation of the toilet has been inspected by the Butte County Building Official, or designee, in consultation with the Public Health Department, Environmental Health Division, hereinafter referred to as the Local Enforcement Agency (LEA).

(2) **Selection of Composting Toilet.**

- (A) The toilet needs to be specifically designed for holding and processing liquid and solid human waste, generally associated with toilet usage, and employs the process of biological degradation in which organic material is

converted into a compost-like substance.

- (B) The toilet needs to be certified and currently listed by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) under NSF/ANSI Standard 41.
- (C) The model of toilet selected must be appropriate for the intensity and duration of use as specified in the manufacturer's recommendations.
- (D) The model of toilet selected is appropriate for the number of users. The assumed number of users should be the higher of the numbers calculated by the following methods:

a. Calculation by Number of Bedrooms:

The number of occupants of each dwelling unit shall be calculated as follows:

- i.) First Bedroom ----- 2 occupants
- ii.) Each additional bedroom ----- 1 additional occupant

b. Calculation by Anticipated Actual Number of Users:

The applicant indicates the maximum foreseeable number of persons who will be living at the residence and using the composting toilet.

c. Examples.

- i.) If only one person will reside in a three bedroom home, the composting toilet selected shall be a toilet recommended to serve at least 4 residents.
- ii.) If five people will reside in a one bedroom home, the composting toilet selected shall be toilet recommended to serve at least 5 occupants.

(3) **Management of Finished Compost and Liquid By-Products.**

- (A) The residual liquid waste by-product of the composting toilet needs to be collected, transported, and discharged in a manner as stated in the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Manual.
- (B) The product of composting digestion needs to be handled and disposed of only after the digestion process is complete as specified in the manufacturer's operation and maintenance instructions; and
- (C) Composting toilets have been shown to be capable of deactivating and/or killing pathogens through the internal processes that take place. Due to external conditions or operational irregularities, the conditions in the unit may not always be optimal for pathogen destruction and im-

proper handling and disposal of the product could adversely impact public health by allowing transmission of a variety of enteric diseases and parasitic illnesses. The product of composting digestion must, therefore, be transported and disposed of in a manner that does not create a public nuisance and is in accordance with the requirements of the operating permit and the owner's operation and maintenance manual, and the following requirements:

- (i) Transportation needs to be by a licensed septic tank pumper to an approved solid waste disposal facility capable of accepting human waste; or
- (ii) Disposition by the homeowner on the property where the toilet is located, needs to meet all the following conditions:
 - a. Bury the waste under a minimum of six (6) inches of compacted soil;
 - b. The location for burial should be shown on a site plan submitted under the LEA's Site Assessment process;
 - c. The waste should not be buried in any present or planned food crop growing areas or dairy pasture; and
 - d. The waste should not be buried where there is less than 36 inches of native, undisturbed soil between the bottom of the burial excavation and a seasonal, perched watertable, or in an area subject to seasonal runoff where the discharge could flow into surface or subsurface water.

(4) **Site Assessment Requirements.**

A site plan and Site Assessment performed by the LEA of the site proposed for disposal of the product of composting digestion should be required as a condition for approval of a composting toilet as an alternative method of waste disposal. Setback requirements for the disposal site should be the same as those in Chapter 19 for septic tank placement.

(5) **Operating Permits.**

- (A) Approval by the LEA of a composting toilet would require an Operating Permit for installation and replacement.
- (B) Operating permits for composting toilets, unless suspended or revoked by the LEA for non-compliance with the LEA requirements, would be valid for the period the permittee resides on the property and utilizes the toilet.
- (C) A person selling a parcel on which there is an approved Operating Permit

for a composting toilet would need to notify the LEA of the transfer and disclose to the prospective purchaser the presence of a composting toilet and the requirement to obtain an operating permit, and the location approved by the LEA for disposal of the product of composting digestion.

- (D) Operating permits would not be transferrable by the seller to the buyer upon sale of the property.
- (E) The LEA would consider revoking an operating permit under any of the following conditions:
 - a. An unsanitary condition has been caused by the toilet or its use;
 - b. The product of composting digestion has been improperly transported, disposed of or used;
 - c. The toilet is not operated or maintained as specified in the operating permit or Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Manual or fails to meet its design or operating specifications; or
 - d. Continued use of the toilet poses an imminent health hazard.
- (6) **Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Manual.**
 - (A) No person should install, maintain, or replace a composting toilet unless an O&M Manual is maintained and available for reference on the premises.
 - (B) The O&M Manual should, at a minimum, contain all the following information:
 - a. Potential health risks from improper use or maintenance of the composting toilet;
 - b. Manufacturer's name and model number;
 - c. Manufacturer's NSF certification;
 - d. Manufacturer's recommended operational capacity;
 - e. Manufacturer's operation and maintenance recommendations;
 - f. Trouble-shooting information;
 - g. Contact information in case of the need for repair or replacement; and
 - h. Method of handling and site for disposal of the product of composting digestion.

(7) **Recorded Disclosure Document.**

A notification in the form of a deed restriction should be recorded informing future property owners of all the following:

- (A) The potential health risks associated with the product of composting digestion;
- (B) The property owner's responsibility to maintain an O&M Manual for the composting toilet;
- (C) The property owner's responsibility to maintain a current operating permit for the composting toilet; and
- (D) The property owner's responsibility for properly operating and maintaining the system in accordance with the O&M Manual and the operating permit.