



ABANDONED CESSPOOLS AND SEPTIC TANKS

Before the City of Manhattan Beach had a City-wide public sewer system, all structures that had plumbing fixtures were connected to on-site private sewage systems. These private systems were usually cesspools and/or septic tanks. Cesspools are approximately 3 to 5 feet in diameter and are about 18 to 25 feet deep. Septic tanks are typically 4 to 6 feet in depth and about 8 to 10 feet long with 2 interior compartments.

During the time period between approximately 1952 and 1965, the City installed the public sewer system. Each building with plumbing fixtures was then connected to the public sewer system out under the public right-of-way. Private on-site sewer systems were then cut off and abandoned.

In 1995, Building Division found that a majority of these cesspools and/or septic tanks were abandoned without adequate compaction of the soil or removal of the systems. This could potentially create a hazardous settlement condition if additions or structures were built on top of or closely adjacent to such empty or partially filled cesspools or septic tanks. However, the city has had no reported incidents from the abandoned cesspools or septic tanks.

The Building Division is now disclosing abandoned cesspools when a Report of Residential Building Records is requested for the sale of a property. Such cesspools or septic tanks become an issue when a building permit is submitted for remodeling, additions or new structure(s). Before issuance of a building permit, the abandoned cesspool and/or septic tank must be inspected by the Building Division. (MBMC 5.36.340, CPC 722.2) Based on the Inspector's observation, a solution to the location of the cesspool and/or septic tank will be reached.

In a few rare instances, the City has records as to the locations of the private sewage systems. If you wish to know if our records show an abandoned cesspool or septic tank on your property, please visit the Community Development Department to search the property records.

Why should I worry about a cesspool?

Older abandoned cesspools are cause for concern since the system can become unstable and collapse, causing a sinkhole within the yard. The vulnerability of the design can be severely impacted due to flooding, heavy rains and tree roots. Since cesspools are at a minimum 3' below the ground surface, falling into a pit which may contain liquids and sludge, can cause serious injury or death.

If you suspect that a sinkhole is forming within your yard, the area should be roped off immediately to prevent anyone from falling into the opening and a qualified expert should be contacted for assistance.

Where is an abandoned septic system usually located?

It is best if the existing exterior sewer line can be traced from the house until it branches out and is cut off. By following the direction of the cut-off line and going down about 3 to 4 feet, the abandoned cesspool and/or septic tank may be found.

Find the main plumbing vent stack (usually 4") coming through the roof, visualize a straight line extending from the stack through the exterior foundation, and then locate and follow the original plumbing line to either the cesspool or septic tank.

Please note, excavating for and following the original sanitary sewer line is the most reliable location method.

When is decommissioning of a septic tank/cesspool required?

- The source of the sewage is permanently eliminated (e.g. a structure is demolished)
- New Construction (e.g. Home, addition, garage, deck) is proposed within 10 feet of an abandoned system.
- A property line adjustment is proposed that would result in an abandoned system being located on a different lot or within five (5) feet of the adjusted property line.

Note: Cesspool/Septic Tank decommissioning **IS NOT REQUIRED** for a real estate transaction. Decommissioning is part of the negotiation between buyer and seller, and will require excavation of the existing yard.

Procedure for the abandonment of cesspools/septic tanks

If abandoned cesspool or septic tank is identified at a proposed job site, the following must be done prior to any demolition or issuance of demolition permit:

Step 1: Locate the cesspool and or septic tank.

Note: An inspection is required even if the system is not located. We need to document if adequate efforts were made or if more digging is required. Leave all excavations open with proper protection over the top to prevent an accident.

- A. Call 310-802-5542 to request an inspection.
- B. Request #105 Cesspool/Septic Tank Location.

Step 2: Remove all of contents within the tank to the natural bottom/grade

Note: Leave the original pipe exposed so the inspector can verify the number of systems on the site. Usually there are two systems, a primary and secondary.

- A. Call 310-802-5542 to request an inspection.
- B. Request #106 Cesspool/Septic Tank Natural Bottom/Grade Observation.

Step 3: Remove completely and re-compact using approved/suitable material (cannot use common soil or dirt).

Suitable materials include: ■ ¾ inch minus gravel ■ Masonry sand ■ Concrete slurry (2 sacks)

Note: A copy of the slurry receipt or compaction report is required prior to inspection approval.

- A. If using sand or gravel, fill in lifts of 1 to 5 feet thick and water down and/or tamp for proper compaction. If a new foundation will be constructed within 10 feet of the septic system, the fill may need to be placed as structural fill and compaction testing required. Consultation with your engineer may be required.
- B. Leave the top 12-18" of the cesspool unfilled so the inspector can observe.

Step 4: Request the inspection after properly filling the system and prior to covering. (Step 3 #B). After inspection approval, complete filling per the soils engineer's recommendation, to final grade.

- A. Call 310-802-5542.
- B. Request #107 Cesspool/Septic Tank Filled/Removal