

Policy on floor drains from garages for one and two family dwellings – Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems

Effective date: May 2012 (update to a November 9, 1992, letter)

Replaces or supersedes: November 9, 1992, letter from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to the Minnesota Department of Health, Plumbing Unit

Program guidance: This memo describes MPCA guidance on the management of floor drain effluent from garages from one and two family residences using Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS). The 1992 letter indicated that this issue was reviewed by MPCA staff in the Groundwater and Solid Waste Division, Hazardous Waste Division, and Water Quality Division. The comments from these diverse programs were incorporated into the original 1992 letter. The consensus was that day lighting of these floor drains was an acceptable practice as long as the effluent did not discharge into surface water or otherwise leave the property where it was generated.

Purpose: Floor drains in residential garages are fairly common, especially in garages which are heated. These are used to dispose of melt water and other accumulated precipitation which enters the garages on vehicles, and in some cases, to dispose of wash water if vehicles are washed indoors. Drips and spills of various automotive fluids can also enter the drains, as can other types of household products stored or used in the garages. Intentional disposal of household hazardous waste may also occur.

All garage floor drains must be connected according to the Minnesota plumbing code, local building codes, and ordinances. However, the MPCA Underground Disposal Policy requires that no floor drain effluent can be disposed of on-site, either through drywells or on-site sewage treatment systems. If this were an industrial or commercial application, a holding tank would be required to be installed and routinely pumped. This is also an option for the homeowner, but could lead to management problems, especially with changes in ownership.

Homeowners may also choose the option of running the floor drain "to daylight", which means that the floor drain effluent would discharge onto the ground surface outside the garage. This would only be allowed if the following conditions are met:

1. Local government approves
2. No commercial or industrial use of the garage
3. No discharge into surface water or surface depressions which lead to surface water (such as swales, ditches, and tile lines)
4. Discharged water must not cross property line
5. Discharge area must be easily visible to homeowner

Rationale for this provision is that the homeowner has a vested interest in protecting their property. They are not likely to discharge materials which would visibly impact their property. The surface discharge will make them more aware of the impacts of their actions. It is more likely to be an aesthetic problem than a health problem, since it does not contain sewage or other sources of pathogenic organisms. Because the person taking the action (the homeowner who disposes into the floor drain) will be the only person affected by that action, there will be a high motivation for self control. Because of the limited scope of the facility, the chances of undesired environmental impacts are less than for commercial/industrial uses.