

What is OnlineRME™?

OnlineRME™ is a Web-based service, provided by OnlineRME LLC, that enables regulatory jurisdictions and other entities to manage onsite wastewater treatment systems with the participation of service providers, system manufacturers, and other stakeholders. The service is modeled on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s *Guidelines for Management of Onsite and Clustered Wastewater Systems*, which recommends practices for Responsible Management Entities (RMEs).

Managing Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems

Approximately 25 percent of the U.S. population is served by onsite wastewater treatment systems. These may be as simple as a septic tank discharging by gravity to a drainfield, or they may include advanced treatment systems with mechanical components. Because population is growing, sewer funding is dwindling, and onsite treatment technology is advancing, onsite systems are here to stay as a permanent wastewater treatment solution.

When onsite systems of any kind malfunction, the consequences can extend far beyond a backup in the house. Sewage may contaminate yards, ditches, wells, groundwater, and surface waters. Consequently, there is a public health need to make sure that onsite systems are functioning properly.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has said the best way to ensure the safety of onsite treatment systems is to manage them correctly. Management means ensuring that a system conforms to its permit and its approved design; that it is correctly installed; that it is inspected on a regular basis; and that it receives any preventive maintenance needed. EPA uses the term *Responsible Management Entity* (RME) to designate the organization responsible for this management, such as a utility or neighborhood association. Where no RME exists, more and more regulatory agencies (for example, county health departments) are seeking to assume this management function within their jurisdictions.

OnlineRME provides Web-based data collection and reporting tools that enable agencies to oversee the onsite wastewater treatment systems within their jurisdictions. Funded by nominal reporting fees collected from service providers, OnlineRME helps regulators inventory their onsite systems, identify those that are out of compliance with their permits, track trends, and ultimately reduce the number of failed systems.

How OnlineRME™ Works

To begin managing its inventory of onsite treatment systems, a jurisdiction must have in place regulations mandating that all onsite treatment systems be designed and installed to code, that they meet defined permit (or performance) requirements, and that they be inspected and maintained at appropriate intervals. To fulfill the inspection and maintenance requirement, homeowners sign contracts with trained service providers.

When a service provider signs the contract to maintain a system, he or she visits the OnlineRME Web site and enters information about that system — location, contact information, and components. This ensures that the inventory of systems within the jurisdiction is up to date. After every inspection or service call, service providers visit the OnlineRME Web

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site and complete a form. On this form they record the components they inspected or serviced and note any deficiencies.

Health officials can look over individual records or generate reports summarizing deficiencies. They can see when a homeowner's contract with a service provider has lapsed, and the system can issue reminders and enforcement letters.

The OnlineRME Web-based service is funded entirely by a small reporting fee that service providers pay for billable activities. Agencies can also use OnlineRME's online payment services to collect other fees from homeowners, builders, or service providers. One hundred percent of these fees go to the agency.

Benefits to Stakeholders

Regulators: Not only does OnlineRME relieve regulators of the burden of managing paper forms, but it also offers data analysis capabilities. OnlineRME can help regulators identify patterns of deficiencies, such as those associated with a geographic area.

OnlineRME is a powerful reporting and management system that can be adapted to meet other compliance and tracking needs. For example, in addition to onsite wastewater programs, jurisdictions can use OnlineRME to manage other inspection/testing/reporting programs. Any regulatory program that includes regular inspections would benefit from a self-funding, Web-based reporting and data management system.

Service providers: OnlineRME is a useful management tool for service providers. It provides paperless recordkeeping, foolproof filing, scheduling and routing functions, and a way of tracking and documenting employees' work. OnlineRME, LLC plans to offer even more sophisticated management software to service providers in the future.

Manufacturers: Manufacturers of onsite treatment systems can view data and reports for systems that use their equipment. This information can help them improve their products and train service providers. Data gathered in this way can also help manufacturers gain approval of their systems in other areas. Manufacturers whose systems have telemetry capabilities can integrate these systems with OnlineRME, saving labor for their service providers while maintaining the security of proprietary data.

Corporations: OnlineRME is not just for regulatory agencies. For example, corporations with many locations, such as retail or restaurant chains, can use OnlineRME to manage their inventory of onsite wastewater systems.

Lending institutions: Banks, environmental groups, and community development organizations that make or subsidize loans for septic system improvement can use OnlineRME to ensure that the systems they invest in are being properly maintained.

The public: Homeowners, Realtors®, contractors, and others can access current and historical inspection data (as laws allow) without having to wait in line at the planning department. Citizens can use OnlineRME to obtain information about new rules and procedures, report code violations, and participate in the work of public committees.