

Dear Sam,

You guys do a great job writing about septic systems in your magazine and at the workshops I've attended, but I want to know about constructing an outhouse or privy on my property for those times the electricity goes off and I have no way to operate my pump. Can I just dig a hole and put an old-fashioned outhouse over it just like in times past?

– Jason, Sheridan County

Dear Jason,

Forget about those times past! It is no longer permissible to dig a plain old hole in the ground for a privy – a special outhouse “vault” is now required. Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) and most county health offices have specific guidelines for the construction of a privy. You'll need to know your underground water table. A privy cannot be built unless there is at least 4 feet between groundwater and the privy vault. Next, the bottom of the privy's vault must be at least 4½ feet deep in the soil and hold a minimum of 500 gallons. The vault needs to be built with construction materials that can withstand the corrosiveness of human waste – most times that means a concrete vault. In building your privy, there are a couple more items to keep in mind. Be sure to include a ventilation pipe, and have it screened to keep out flies and rodents. If properly ventilated, outhouse odors will be significantly reduced, and your neighbors will not be mad at you. You'll also need to build a cleanout manhole outside of the privy that has a minimum of a 20-inch opening for pumping the contents of the vault. For more information, go to the WDEQ Web site on page 11-115 of http://deq.state.wy.us/wqd/WQDrules/Chapter_11.pdf. Talk to either your county health department or WDEQ officials for their guidance on where to best locate your privy. A good outhouse is worth its weight in gold when you absolutely need it!

Sincerely, **Sam**

ask Sam



This column features questions from landowners submitted via the Web site. To submit a question to Small Acre Sam, visit BarnyardsandBackyards.com. If your question is featured, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Barnyards & Backyards*!