



clean waters | clean neighborhoods

# Septic Tank Elimination Program (STEP) Guide

## The Problem

Thousands of homes in Marion County remain served by private septic systems. Septic systems have a limited life and eventually fail, discharging human waste into groundwater, backyards and neighborhood ditches and streams.

## The Solution

To address health hazards in our neighborhoods, Citizens Energy Group (Citizens) is continuing the City of Indianapolis' efforts to connect many neighborhoods on septic systems to the sanitary sewer system through the Septic Tank Elimination Program (STEP).

Citizens prioritizes project areas by a number of factors, the primary of which are housing density; proximity to a floodplain; and the presence of residential drinking water wells. It is important to also note that the goal of STEP is to improve water quality, not eliminate the use of septic systems in areas where water quality impacts are not as great.

Since 2011, more than 7,000 properties have connected through Citizens' STEP.

## The Benefits

STEP helps Citizens comply with a federal mandate to virtually eliminate discharges of raw sewage to area rivers and streams by the end of the year 2025. The benefits of STEP are far-reaching:

- Reduced health hazards and environmental risks in homes and neighborhood ditches
- Cleaner streams from reduced failed septic system runoff
- Future cost savings for repair and/or replacement of septic system (estimated between \$3k - \$10k)

## The Costs

Property owners will be able to pay one fee for connection and construction; to one entity (i.e., Citizens Energy Group) if they agree to participate in our program within the allotted time. (\*Offer is only good for a limited time. See **60-Day Offer** and **Final Offer** sections for more details.)

As a property owner, there are two main costs to connect to the sewer under the **60-Day Offer** (See STEP Enrollment Agreement for specific details.):

1. Citizens will be responsible for constructing the sewer system, including the lateral connection to your home, abandoning your septic system in place and installing a low-pressure system (i.e., grinder pump) including connecting to your home's electrical system. Property owners have two options for paying for the connection:

**Option A** - The cost to property owners for this project is \$2,739 per single-family home. This includes the \$2,530

baseline sewer connection fee and the \$209 Building Sewer Application and Permit Fee. The property owner agrees to pay for this in one lump sum in the amount of \$2,739.

**Option B** - Opt for the installment plan in which the property owner would be responsible for making sixty (60) equal monthly payments of \$45.65 for a total of \$2,739.

2. Your monthly sewer bill which you will receive from Citizens Energy Group.

If a property owner elects to secure their own contractor to construct the lateral, abandon/remove their septic system, install the grinder pump and electrical connection, Citizens still requires the property owner to pay the \$2,530 baseline sewer connection fee and the \$209 Building Sewer Application and Permit Fee as an upfront, lump sum payment before construction permits are issued. Once the required fees (\$2,739) have been paid, Citizens will provide a grinder pump.

**Please note:** The installment payment plan (Option B) is not available to property owners not participating in the Citizens Installation Program.

## How To Enroll

If your property has been identified as part of STEP, you have the option to enroll in the Citizens Installation Program by:

1. Completing the Septic Tank Elimination Program (STEP) Enrollment Agreement, which outlines specific details of the work Citizens and/or its contractor(s) will perform to connect your property to the sewer system; property access you will need to grant; payment options; and other important details related to the Citizens Installation Program. Enrollment Agreements must be submitted in person or by mail by the deadline contained on the agreement.
2. Whether you indicate Option A or B for payment of the required fees (i.e., connection and permitting) on the Enrollment Agreement, you either will be receiving instructions from Citizens regarding your lump sum payment, or your required monthly payment will appear on your sewer bill once your service is connected.
3. If you have questions regarding enrollment in the Citizens Installation Program or the Enrollment Agreement, please call 317-927-4444 (option 3).

\* **Please note:** If you are selling, or are planning to sell your property, you must disclose participation in a STEP project.

\*\* Neither Citizens, nor its contractors will ever come door-to-door to request payment for STEP.

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## What If I Miss the 60-Day Offer Enrollment Deadline?

From the date of the last public meeting for your project area, you have up to 60 days in which you can opt to participate in the Citizens 60-Day Offer. However, if you miss that deadline, but would still like to participate in the Citizens Installation Program, you may elect to take advantage of the Final Offer. The specific details of this offer are outlined in the STEP Enrollment Agreement, but payment of an additional \$500 fee, a direct pass-through cost to Citizens' contractor for the remobilization of equipment and resources, is required before the Final Offer date outlined in your enrollment agreement. After the Final Offer date expires, property owners are ineligible to participate in the Citizens Installation Program. The \$500 fee must be paid upfront and separately from your enrollment costs of \$2,739. Payment of the additional \$500 fee cannot be made in installments. Total payment would be \$3,239 under the Final Offer.

## What is a Low-Pressure System

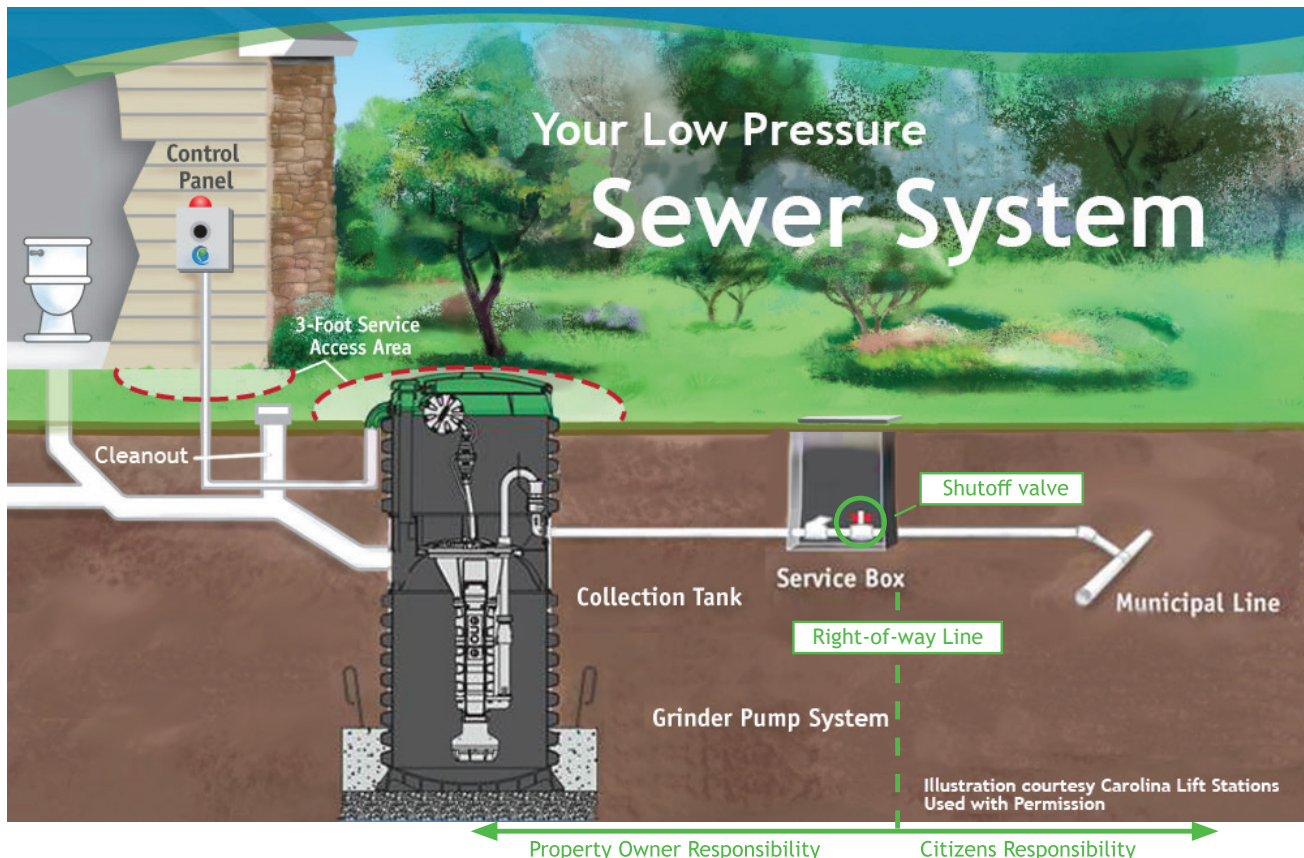
STEP uses a low-pressure sewer system - NOT gravity.

- Low-pressure systems (LPS) require a pumping unit (i.e., grinder pump system) at each property.
- Grinder pump systems are connected to a smaller diameter sewer than a gravity system in the public right-of-way (i.e., street).
  - Sewer is under "low pressure."
  - Eventually, the small diameter pipe connects to a gravity sewer system for sewage to be conveyed to the treatment plant.
- LPS require a control panel on the house to alert the property owner of any issues.
- LPS require a service box at the property line similar to a water meter pit.

- LPS installation uses horizontal directional drilling and minimal excavations, allowing for a minimally disruptive installation.

## System Ownership

- Once installation is complete, property owners are responsible for operating and maintaining everything on their property outside of the right-of-way. This includes the following:
  - Grinder pump system
  - Control panel
  - Sewer piping to service box
  - Service box (but not the shutoff valve inside)
- Citizens is responsible for operating and maintaining everything within the right-of-way. This includes the following:
  - Sewer mainline
  - Shutoff valve inside the service box
  - Air release valves
  - Manholes
- A three-year warranty is included in each Septic Tank Elimination Program (STEP) Enrollment Agreement. Citizens is responsible for the full three-year warranty as part of our maintenance warranty bond required by the contractor. We will fix all components other than direct damage caused by the customer.
  - If customers experience any issues with the Low-Pressure System within the warranty period, they should call Citizens' Customer Service at (317) 924-3311 and request to be transferred to the Underground Engineering and Construction team for STEP.
- Following warranty expiration, customers are responsible for all troubleshooting, operation and maintenance on the property owner responsibility side of the right-of-way line (See diagram) including lateral, pump and/or discharge pipe clogging; electrical problems; power outages; freezing conditions; and system failures caused by the property owner's discharge of improper wastes (e.g., "flushable" wipes, excessive grease, etc.).



# Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Grinder Pump Systems

## What is a grinder pump system?

A grinder pump system is a pumping unit consisting of a pump and small pipe from the unit to the sewer system. Installed outside of your home, grinder pump systems are used to discharge wastewater from your home to the sewer system in the street or right-of-way.

What are the average life-cycle costs of a grinder pump system?

A grinder pump system's life-cycle costs are very similar to other major appliances, such as a furnace or air conditioner. Based on the manufacturer's data, a grinder pump system should be evaluated for replacement after 15-20 years of operation. However, it may be prudent for customers to start planning and budgeting for replacement after 10 years of use. The average cost to replace the grinder pump is approximately \$3,000.00. Like other major appliances, service calls will be necessary as parts wear out and require replacement over time, customers can expect a service call for maintenance to cost an average of \$575.00.

## Are additional warranties available for purchase?

Extended warranties and service plans can be purchased through the pump sales representative, Covalen. Find out more at [www.Covalen.com/STEP](http://www.Covalen.com/STEP). This link is also available on the Citizens Energy Group website at [www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/STEP](http://www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/STEP).

## Who can service or fix my grinder pump system?

On each grinder pump, Covalen lists a phone number: (317) 789-8888. As your local wastewater utility, Citizens is also available to answer questions and provide more information on who may be contacted to service your grinder pump. Please contact us at 317-924-3311, or directly at our STEP Hotline at (317) 927-4444 (option 3).

## What are the electrical requirements for operating the grinder pump system?

For optimal performance, 240-volt 1 phase 30 amp service is best, but 20 amp is acceptable. The cost for electricity to the grinder pump is estimated to cost about \$23.00 per year (assuming 4 residence and a cost of \$0.16/kWh for electricity).



Above: Cross-section of  
Grinder Pump System

## What happens during a power failure?

If the power goes out, the grinder pump system and its alarm system will not work because they both require electricity. However, the pump system does have storage capacity.

During power outages, the two largest producers of wastewater, dishwashers and washing machines, are not in use; therefore, your water usage decreases. Because the length of the power outage cannot be planned, you should conserve water to the best of your ability. On all pump systems Citizens installs through STEP, a generator receptacle and auto-transfer switch are provided.

## How big is the grinder pump system, and what does it look like?

The grinder pump system lid is about 26 inches in diameter and rises approximately 4 - 5 inches above the ground. The lid can be painted but needs to remain accessible. (See image below.) The control panel also will be above ground and visible. It is enclosed in a small weatherproof box so that it can be easily accessed.

## My septic tank sometimes has an odor. Will the grinder pump system also produce an odor?

No. When wastewater sits, as it does in a septic system, it becomes septic and produces a distinctive odor. Since the grinder pump system will remove wastewater by pumping it into the sewer system, you should not notice any odor.

## Are there specific things that I should not put down the drain or flush?

Similar to a septic system, you should not put things down any drain that can damage the pump or cause it to wear more quickly. Improper disposal of items to the grinder pump system will void the warranty; increase maintenance costs; and decrease system life. Examples of items that should not be put down any drain include: coffee grounds, bones, grease, diapers, "flushable" wipes\*, floss, hygiene products, and other items that are not indicated for safe disposal into the sewage system. Sump pumps and gutter drains should not be connected to your grinder pump system.

*\*Even products labeled as "flushable" can adversely impact your grinder pump system.*



Above: Surface view of the Grinder Pump System (post-installation)

## Agencies Involved in STEP

Citizens constructs sewers in the public right-of-way and oversees the payment plan which allows residents to pay the STEP enrollment fee in installments.

The Marion County Health Department notifies property owners when they are required to connect to the sewer system and is the enforcement agency for connections.

For detailed information regarding wastewater rates and fees, as well as Wastewater Terms and Conditions, please visit: [www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/Notices](http://www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/Notices)

## Online Resources

[www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/STEP](http://www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/STEP)

[www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/Construction](http://www.CitizensEnergyGroup.com/Construction)

[STEP@CitizensEnergyGroup.com](mailto:STEP@CitizensEnergyGroup.com)



*Above: Here is a view of the grinder pump system in the trench. This is prior to piping, refilling the trench with soil and leveling of the site.*



*Above: Directional boring machines allow pipe to be installed under streets without disruptive street cutting and excavation.*