



Indian Health Service
Winslow Service Unit, DSFC
500 North Indiana Ave
Winslow, Arizona 86047
928.289.6170

Dear Medical Doctor it may concern,

Indian Health Service, Office of Environmental Health & Engineering, Division of Sanitation Facilities Construction (DSFC) requires documentation for the provision of sanitation facilities (i.e. cistern systems and conventional plumbing) to homeowners with a medical condition. The documentation of a medical condition is the “medical referral”, a letter signed by a medical doctor, which refers the patient to the DSFC and informs this office of a special need. A “medical condition” in this sense is a chronic condition, and does not include acute conditions such as viral infections, broken bones, or strained muscles. In today’s climate of environmental and historic regulatory requirements, acute conditions would be overcome before the facilities requested could clear all these requirements and be installed. As there are literally thousands of Navajo homes in the need of these facilities, medical referrals must be confined to long term (lifetime) conditions.

Quite often, the medical referral participant’s home is remote, far enough from existing water mains to make a connection to a community water system economically, and sometimes physically, infeasible. In these instances a cistern system is the only remaining option to get potable water in the home.

A cistern is a 1,000-gallon, composite tank buried in the ground near the house. The water is pumped into the household plumbing by a pump installed directly inside the house. A drawback to this type of installation is that it requires someone to haul water from a safe source to regularly (generally weekly) refill the cistern. This requirement may place a large burden on an elderly, or physically infirm person unless a family or community member can commit to regularly and dependably performing the task. **There is the possibility that unregulated, even unsafe, sources might be exploited for the purposes of convenience and expense and each trip will be further possibility for contamination.** Lastly, maintenance of this system will eventually require the replacement of the pump, which can be a prohibitively expensive proposition for some. Research indicates half of these systems are eventually abandoned, indicating a questionable use of limited program funds.

The intent of this letter, then, is to provide information to the medical staff of some of the difficulties which may be encountered by medical referral patients. We ask that the medical staff consider this information when providing medical referrals to patients, and, in some cases, even recommend other options to patients requesting referrals (e.g., move to a closer to a community where community water systems are available, requesting housing assistance).

I appreciate your consideration of these salient points when considering a medical referral for the patients visiting the hospital. If you have any questions, please contact this office at (928)289-6176 or (928)289-6170.

Sincerely,

Kevin Gore, Field Engineer, Winslow DSFC

cc: