

St. Marys River Management Committee

Septic Think Tank Meeting

Risk-based Inspection of On-Site Sewage Disposal Systems

July 8, 2014

Meeting began at 10:00 AM at Charlton High School in Room 50

Present:

Patrick Higgins	Nassau County, Environmental Health Specialist
Michael Godwin	Nassau County, Environmental Supervisor
Jacob Oakley	Charlton County, Environmental Health
Terry Graham	Baker County, Environmental Health Specialist
Terry Ferrell	Camden County, Environmental Health Manager
Josh Howard	SMRMC, Charlton County
Chip Campbell	SMRMC, Charlton County
Merrill Varn	SMRMC, Charlton County
Rick Frey	SMRMC, Camden County
Katie Sheehan, J.D.	University of Georgia, Presenter

Merrill Varn moderated the program and began the meeting by reviewing the results of the septic tank survey of septic system regulations completed in 2010 by each county and related regulations promulgated by the states of Florida and Georgia. Several edits were made.

Katie Sheehan, J.D., Odum School of Ecology, River Basin Center, UGA, gave the presentation, On-Site Sewage Management Systems, Risk-Based Operations and Maintenance Policy, and the proposed ordinance in Chatham and Bryan (GA) counties. Discussion followed as the counties responded to the content of the presentation.

The principle obstacle to any encouragement to step up on-site maintenance was the limited availability of septage dump site available to each county. It was noted that it was useless to step up repair and maintenance, until dump sites were available. At present, Camden pumpers must haul their loads to Glynn County for dumping, and that site in Brunswick is limited for out-of-county dumpers. The Camden centralized plants do not accept septage.

Other related obstacles include chronic over usage of water and lack of system maintenance. Economic disincentive for the home owner to absorb ongoing maintenance costs is problematic and in some cases, the home owner may pay less to hook up to municipal sewer services.

In general, the counties felt that the proposed ordinance at this time was not advised. Terry Graham of Baker, commented that the ordinance standards, unless state initiated, would not be acceptable to his commissioners, at this time. This appeared to be related to a general

resistance to regulatory over-reach.

Terry Ferrell of Camden believed that, assuming dumping problem was solved, his commissioners would be open to the risk-based ordinance, as long as it was clear what problem it was attempting to address. New and repaired systems are already covered by stricter regulation. If the problem was existing grandfathered systems, those problems would be difficult to identify under current Georgia regulations.

Discussion followed regarding identification of high risk areas. As mentioned in the presentation, Georgia has Wellstrom mapping with red, orange, yellow, and green overlays designed to identify high risk areas. Florida has a similar mapping system of high risk areas. Merrill Varn asked if there were any Wellstrom red zones along the St. Marys River; specifically, did they coincide with 303 listed tributaries of Horsepen and Spanish Creeks in Georgia? Were either of the listed creeks in Florida considered high risk areas? She suggested that at the next meeting, we need to compare EPD/DEP and health department maps. Jacob Oakley of Charlton indicated that hot spots can also be identified by call volume from a particular area.

Discussion then turned to public education campaigns at targeted high-risk areas. All counties indicated that such programs are currently ongoing and could be stepped up in identified high risk areas. Identification of high-risk target areas by means such as the ones discussed above could take place at a following meeting. Health specialists were asked to think about how to identify high-risk areas and potential methods of educating before the next meeting.

In conclusion, adoption of a proposed ordinance would have to originate with the state in Florida, and that was seen as very unlikely. For now, identifying high-risk areas and providing targeted education is the best approach. In Camden, the dumping capacity limitations need to be solved before any attempt is proposed to broaden its pumping activities. The group agreed that continued discussion was important. It was suggested that the group meet again in early October 2014 to discuss education and to identify high risk areas. Both Georgia counties agreed that it was best to await results from the pilot projects in Bryan and Chatham counties before pursuing any sort of inspection ordinance. The St. Marys River Management Committee will look into the advisability of setting up a meeting between the municipal wastewater department, the pumpers and the environmental health manager in Camden to discuss septage dumping, will work with Jacob Oakley and Charlton county staff to further investigate the possibility of identifying high risk areas along the river in Charlton Co, and will work to collect EPD/DEP maps to compare with the "red zones" identified by state health departments.

Submitted by Rick Frey