



THURSTON COUNTY
WASHINGTON
SINCE 1852

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OFFICE OF PROGRAM AND BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

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Henderson Inlet Shellfish Protection District
Stakeholder Group
Meeting Notes of August 19, 2002

Present: Jack Beeching, Bruce Rouillard, Peter Heide, Mark Sloan, Linda Lentz, Roy Iwai, and Lisa Dennis-Perez
Not Present: Gene Hummel, Steve Langer, Ben Nelson, and Laura Hamilton
County Staff: Mark J. Swartout, Steve Petersen, and Sue Davis
Guests: Tim Ransom and Lindi Schmidt

1. Meeting called to order by the chair at 6:40.
2. Introductions, Approved Agenda, Approved the July 15th Meeting Notes, and Linda Lentz was added as an additional alternate for Jerry Yamashita.
3. Discussion about the County's On-Site Sewage Program
 - a. Sue Davis – Environmental Health Division / Resource Protection
 - i. History of investigative work.
 1. The County performed dye testing of septic systems on Henderson Inlet from 1996 – 1999, which was paid for by a grant. The area had a total of 210 possible septic systems with 58 volunteering to be tested. The failure rate of those tested was about 14%. This failure rate has been a common rate in other testing programs.
 2. A handout was provided showing the results of water quality testing for fecal coliform along the Henderson Inlet shoreline. It identified “hot spots” that led to additional dye testing of septic systems in the vicinity of the high fecal coliform counts.
 3. A septic system is failing when there are both a presence of the dye and a fecal coliform count of 200 colonies / 100 ml or greater.
 4. All the systems that were found to be failing were repaired.
 5. Typically, the dye-test projects along shorelines in Thurston County have found that half of those systems needing repair had problems with system components not the whole system. The cost of repairing components is usually relatively low.
 6. Odor is not always associated with failed systems.
 7. The work of a consultant found a weak correlation between failed systems and age, system types, and distance from shoreline.

- ii. Slide Show – showing common failures of septic systems components. These components include the distribution box failing due to shifting, broken sewer line from house to septic tank, leaking of grout at the inlet / outlet pipes in the septic tank (common in tanks 10 years old and older), various fittings in pressure systems, and failed pumps that had no functioning alarm.
- iii. Question - Does dye testing works on streamsides? Dye testing doesn't work as well on streamside properties compared to marine shorelines due to the higher flow rates of rivers and streams.
- iv. Briefly discussed the DNA study – Sue repeated much of what is in the study. What was emphasized were:
 - 1. The presence of E. coli bacteria from humans and dogs was seen more frequently in the more urban watershed (Woodland Creek) than in the rural watershed (Swayne creeks).
 - 2. Sue clarified the issue about general vs. specific categories of fecal coliform such as canine (general) and dog (specific) or avian (general) and gull or geese. When the presence of a species specific bacteria was found (e.g. dog) it was included as such when it was undetermined to a specific species it was included as canine (general).
- v. Sue distributed a handout showing trends in recent coliform testing in reaches of Woodland Creek.
 - 1. The biggest problem reach apparently is from Martin Way to Pleasant Glade Road.
 - 2. Very good example of investigative work and much appreciated by the Committee members.
 - 3. The one page map showed fecal levels at specific monitoring sites after various 12-hour rain events. It also used color and numbers to illustrate reaches that gained or lost fecal coliform load between monitoring sites.
- vi. Sue also discussed that the county is getting near to knowing whether the latest Centennial Grant will be awarded by Ecology. The grant will fund additional work in the watershed including proposing a “Risk Based” Operational and Maintenance On-Site Program within the District.
- b. Steve Petersen – Environmental Health Division.
 - i. The Health Department reviews about 1,200 permits per year for new (850), repairs (150), and voluntary upgrades (200) for septic systems.
 - ii. For new construction the county looks for two things.
 - 1. How the site will disperse the effluent.
 - 2. How the site will treat the effluent.
 - iii. Their experience is about 50% of failed systems are caused by failure of components not the entire system.
 - iv. It is strongly recommended that property owners have a diagnosis of the failed system before a permit for repair is issued.
 - v. Through a public involvement effort the Department developed an On-Site Construction Standards Manual, which went into effect last Feb. 1st 2002.
 - 1. The Standards leveled the playing field for contractors and has been strongly supported by the industry.
 - 2. The manual provides basic standards for on-site septic system construction.
 - 3. Currently it is a Policy adopted by the Board and will become code the

- next time the Sanitary Code is updated.
4. The manual has brought about a significant improvement in construction of on-site systems, which should reduce many of the failures of system components in the future.
 5. County staff currently is able to perform final inspections of about 60% of the systems. The recent addition of a new employee authorized by the Board will soon bring final inspections to 100%.
 6. Installers are now certified – are held accountable for their work – allows disciplinary actions.
 7. Designers are licensed by the state Health Department.
- vi. Operational Certificate Program for existing systems.
1. In the 1980's through mid 1990's all newly installed, upgraded systems, and property sales (w/septics) required the issuance of an Operational Certificate. This program was altered as a result of changes the Board of Health adopted. Those property owners that were issued Operational Certificates up to this point in time receive on a regular basis informational material about the care and maintenance of their systems.
 2. Currently Operational Certificates are issued for:
 - a. Sand Filters.
 - b. Mound systems.
 - c. When certain waivers are issued.
 - d. When proprietary devices are installed.
 3. What it means to have an Operational Certificate:
 - a. The goal behind Operational Certificates is to assure on-site sewage systems are properly operated and maintained. Properly monitored and maintained systems have longer operating lives and can have less impact on our water resources.
 - b. The Operational Certificate typically (some exceptions) is for a three-year period.
 - c. Upon renewal the homeowner is asked to evaluate the septic tank and pump chamber. The homeowner or industry professional can do the evaluation. The Department provides the homeowner with information on how to properly evaluate their tanks.
 - d. The septic tank should be pumped only if needed. If pumped, a receipt is required.
 - e. The homeowner also is asked if there are any wet spots, seeps, or areas where water surfaces.
 4. Current Operational Certificate Program does not do a good job at finding and locating failed systems.
 5. The industry (pumpers) does not do a good job of reporting failed systems to the county.
- vii. Failures are defined in county code and include backing up in the house, effluent surfacing, or presence of both dye and fecal coliform counts equal or greater than 200 colonies / 100 ml.
- viii. The law requires that failed systems be repaired.
- c. Steve mentioned the County has several resources to help the public with their septic systems. One is a Septic Help Line at (360) 357-2490 where anyone can call and ask questions and get answers about septic systems. The other is the county website

<http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/welcome.html#top> - click on Environmental Health at the top of the page.

- d. Question – What is the health risk of a failed septic system?

Answer: Exposure to sewage from failing septic systems can result in transmission of illnesses such as hepatitis, cholera and less severe gastroenteritis, which are relatively rare. Failing sewage systems more typically result in general environmental degradation and are considered another form of non-point pollution.

4. Agenda for September 16th meeting.

- a. Public comments.
- b. Continue discussion on Quick wins.
- c. Discuss products and report format – read and discuss examples from other shellfish district.
- d. October Agenda

5. Adjourn – 8:30