



THURSTON COUNTY
WASHINGTON
SINCE 1852

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Cathy Wolfe
District One
Diane Oberquell
District Two
Robert N. Macleod
District Three

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Sherri McDonald, RN, MPA
Director
Diana T. Yu, MD, MSPH
Health Officer

Risk-Based O&M Program Project: Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes from January 28, 2004

7:00 – 9:00 pm

Members Present: Mark Blosser, City of Olympia, Henderson Shellfish Protection District
Roy Iwai, City of Olympia, Henderson Shellfish Protection District
Lisa Dennis- Perez, City of Lacey
Christine Buckley, Nisqually Shellfish Protection District
Tris Carlson, Nisqually Shellfish Protection District
Linda Malatesta, Nisqually Shellfish Protection District
Bryan Wilson, Nisqually Shellfish Protection District
Peter Heide, Henderson Shellfish Protection District
Steve Langer, Henderson Shellfish Protection District
Mark Sloan Henderson Shellfish Protection District
Priscilla Terry, Henderson Watershed Resident
David Hall, Thurston Conservation District Supervisor
Seldon Hall, Washington State Department of Health
Terry Hull, Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team
Mike Petit, WRIA 13 Planning Unit
Randy Jackson, Certified Septic System Designer
Bill Dewey, Shellfish Industry
Jerry Yamashita, Shellfish Industry

Staff: Linda Hofstad, Environmental Health
Steve Petersen, Environmental Health
Art Starry, Environmental Health
Mark Swartout, Development Services

Guests present: Mark Fischer, Community Shellfish Farm Project
Chris Hempleman, Department of Ecology
Kris VanGorkum (Thurston Conservation District)

1. Introductions were made of all committee members.
2. Next two meetings were established – February 11th and March 10th.

3. Three elements discussed:

- a. When and how often should a septic system get inspected / what are the risk criteria?
- 1) The group discussed the green handout “Ranking for Inspections”.
 - 2) The matrix uses two categories Frequency of inspections and Types of Inspection.
 - 3) There was a question whether points should be added for having a garbage disposal.
Response: use of garbage disposals is discouraged. Survey data hasn't shown having one increases risk.
 - 4) There was a concern expressed that since the large majority of the septic systems in these watersheds are residential, there should be more categories, e.g. age of system just has two classes.
Response: Findings have shown that only systems more than 20 years old have an increased tendency to failure.
 - 5) There was a concern expressed whether the point matrix really deals with differences in systems such as rural density vs. higher more urban densities.
Response: The matrix involves use of the dye-trace tool for intensive inspections. Currently, there are no known tools available to conduct intensive surveys on inland septic systems where there is no drainage off the property through drains, seeps, upwellings, or surface flow. The program needs to be diligent in looking for new tools for that type of evaluation, which can pinpoint impacts to groundwater and subsurface flows. However, all systems within the matrix do have some level of inspection – it is just less intense for systems that do not pose a problem to surface waters.
- b. Who does the inspection? The group used for reference the following handouts - On-Site Operation and Maintenance Inspections and the Service Provider Matrix.
- 1) The group spent considerable time discussing whether the pumper should provide a report to the county about the condition of the system at the time of pumping.
 - 2) The group discussed the issue of when an inspector is working for the homeowner or the county. If the private industry person always has to provide a copy of the report to the county, then is the industry person working for the county? Does that requirement impair the relationship with the citizen client?
 - 3) Dye Testing – who and how often?
 - i. Perform every 6 years or possibly 9 years – use program data results to determine frequency of dye test.
 - ii. A system needs to be developed to avoid invalid surveys. Due to the possibility of the high cost repair if the system is found failing, there may be inclination to hire someone who provides a ‘more favorable’ report.
 - iii. The group discussed an analogous program. This type of program has similarities to air emission testing in other states by private companies. In Washington State the testing is done by the state in areas with air pollution problems.
 - iv. A list of certified inspectors that would provide an alternative to homeowners that don't wish to have government employees on their property. The property owner could choose the third party inspector (either private or the county) and the county could pay for it. This would assure that they are paid and that the inspections would follow protocol and be consistent.

- v. Require inspections on a regular basis e.g. every 6 years. If the property owner fails to have the inspection, they will be in violation. As well as if the septic systems is found to be failing, they will also be in violation.
 - vi. Charge all properties with septic systems \$100 / 3 years and waive the fee if the property owner renews their certificate as an incentive or pay a lower rate if the property owner complies.
- c. Enforcement
- 1) Enforcement has been intertwined with the discussion all evening
 - 2) Need to determine the objective of the program in order to determine what type of enforcement / compliance is needed.
 - 3) The County has an effective program of enforcement when current septic systems failures are confirmed.
 - 4) Compliance with a proactive program, such as being discussed, is a different consideration.
 - 5) A two-page memo from one of the members was distributed opposing any type of on-going inspection program for septic system unless there is probable cause.
 - 6) Another member challenged the author of the memo to come back to the next meeting with a workable solution that will help resolve this issue.

Handouts included:

On-site Operation and Maintenance Inspection
Risk-based O&M Pilot Program for Septic Systems – Service Providers Worksheet
On-Site Operation and Maintenance Inspections
Service Provider Matrix