

Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (POWTS) Program - 2013

Rationale for program	<p>Almost 24,000 Dane County households and businesses dispose of domestic wastewater through a private septic system, also known as a private onsite wastewater treatment system or POWTS. These systems are a safe and sustainable method for handling domestic wastewater if they are installed, operated, and maintained appropriately. Our program staffs work to ensure that septic systems are installed properly and do not become an environmental or human health hazard.</p>						
Program Objectives	<p>Ensure that all POWTS installed in Dane County are code compliant and operate in a manner that protects human health and the environment.</p> <p>Inventory and track all POWTS in Dane County to ensure proper operation and maintenance.</p> <p>Investigate all complaints related to failing septic systems or the illegal operation of these systems</p> <p>Enforce County and State laws when necessary to correct problems related to private septic maintenance</p>						
Current Activities	<p><u>Staffing:</u> Total FTE of 3 staff (5 Sanitarians each working .35 FTE in the program, 1.25 Administrative Support) and an Environmental Health Services Supervisor.</p> <p><u>Onsite soil verification inspections:</u> All soil tests in Dane County receive an onsite soil verification inspection to confirm the observational findings of the soil tester. Activity required in SPS 385.50</p> <p><u>Agent Plan Review:</u> Our agency is authorized by the WI Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) under SPS 383.22 to review private septic system plans prior to their installation. A plumber or designer may submit plans to us or WI DSPS for review.</p> <p><u>Sanitary Permit Review:</u> Prior to installation of a septic system, an owner is required to obtain an approved sanitary permit from the county as required by SPS 383.21. Program staff review all permit applications and ensure that the proposed system will be installed according to the plan and state codes.</p> <p><u>POWTS Construction Inspection:</u> SPS 383.26 provides our agency the authority to inspect the construction of private septic system to ensure they are constructed according to the approved plan and permit. Observed changes require the plumber to submit a revised plan and / or permit application for review.</p> <p><u>Triennial Maintenance:</u> SPS 383.255 requires that our agency have an inventory and maintenance monitoring program in which septic systems are tracked and maintenance practices are recorded.</p> <p><u>Complaint Investigation:</u> Program staffs investigate reports of failing septic systems or inappropriate operation to reduce the potential harm that can be caused by inappropriate release of domestic wastewater.</p> <p><u>Accela Database:</u> In order to accomplish the above activities, program staffs maintain a database of septic systems, soil tests, and maintenance reports. Accela has replaced the programs first database. Portions of the Accela database are still in development.</p>						
Funding (2012)	<table> <tr> <td>Permitting and Inspection Fees:</td><td style="text-align: right;">\$248,714</td></tr> <tr> <td>Septic Maintenance fees:</td><td style="text-align: right;">\$205,196</td></tr> <tr> <td>Total Septic Program revenue:</td><td style="text-align: right; border-top: 1px solid black;">\$454,800</td></tr> </table> <p>Objective for program is that all program costs are fee-funded.</p>	Permitting and Inspection Fees:	\$248,714	Septic Maintenance fees:	\$205,196	Total Septic Program revenue:	\$454,800
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Challenges Dane County Population: Current State Statute identifies counties as the "Governmental Unit" responsible for regulation of private septic systems. However, once Dane County exceeds 500,000 in population, the statutes identify the city, village, or town as the responsible "Governmental Unit". This will mean that all of the required actions listed above will fall to the municipal governments.

Accela Database: New computer system is not fully functional and management is limited in its ability to generate necessary reports. Staff continues to work with Madison IT to obtain the necessary reports and system functionality.

Future Directions Online submission of sanitary permits, plans, soil tests, and well permits: Discussions with IT have already started to start development on this next step in 2013.

ATU Tracking: Aerobic Treatment Units (ATU) and other advanced septic systems allow property owners to install and operate private septic systems in less than optimal locations. Due to their increased need for maintenance, complexity, and potential for malfunction, these systems require more frequent maintenance. Currently this maintenance is being tracked manually with paper reports. The program needs to move this process into Accela where tracking can be more efficient.

Metal Tanks: In the past, metal septic tanks were installed as components in private septic systems. These tanks are more susceptible to failure than are concrete tanks. Some other counties have started working to remove metal tanks from systems on their inventory by ordering owners to replace the tank. At this point I have started collecting data on how many metal tanks are in use in Dane County. I have also informed pumpers and plumbers that we are looking at the issue and may need to take action in the future.