SEPTIC SYSTEMS AND WATER QUALITY PROTECTION

Charlotte County Water Quality Seminar

Terri Lowery
Senior Vice President

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WHY IS THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT TO ME?

Jackson Blue Springs

Silver Springs
A HISTORY OF SEPTIC TANKS

- In use since the turn of the 20th century
- Housing boom outgrew the rate of sewer construction
- Today septic systems serve more than 1 in 5 households in the US
THE NUMBERS IN FLORIDA

- Approximately 2.6 million septic tanks are in Florida
- 12% of the septic tanks in the US are in Florida
- Approximately 30% of the state relies on septic tanks
Many septic systems are failing.

Even those in perfect operation discharge nitrogen at high levels.

Not always permitted in the right locations:
- Sensitive waterways
- High groundwater table
- Small lots
THE BACK STORY

• Algal blooms and Red Tide
• 2016 springs protection legislation identified FDEP, Local Governments, and Utilities as responsible parties
• Governor DeSantis’ Water Policy reforms
A CHALLENGING TOPIC WITH A LOT OF STAKEHOLDERS

- Regulators
  - FDEP
  - FDOH
  - WMDs
- Local Governments/Utilities
- Environmental Groups
- Property Rights Groups
- Builders/Realtors
- Legislators
- John Q. Citizen
ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL SEPTIC SYSTEMS

- Gravity Sewer
- Low Pressure (Grinder/STEP)
- Vacuum
- Advanced OSTDS
- Dispersed Sewer Network
CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

• Cost & Funding
• Sustained Political Leadership
• Public Education
• On-going Proliferation of New OSTDSs
COST & FUNDING CHALLENGES

• $20,000 to $25,000+ per lot to extend sewer
  • Is there existing water service to an area?
  • How far are you from the treatment facilities?
  • Is there plant capacity?
  • What are the site conditions?
  • What is the population density?
• Fairness/equity - Who should pick up the tab?
• Potential funding sources
  • State & federal funds
  • Local sources
External Funding
- Springs Funding/Amendment 1 Dollars
- USDA Rural Development
- CDBG
- SRF Clean Water Fund/Small Community WW Grant
- TMDL Grant Program
- 319 Grant Funds
- Legislative Appropriation
- WMD Funding
- Economic Development

Internal Funding
- Connection Fees
- User Fees
- MSBU/MSTU
- CRA
- LOST
- Ad Valorem
- REDI
SUSTAINED POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

• A controversial topic at best
• Local commitment is expected
  • Mandatory connection ordinances
  • Matching funds
  • Utility rate structures to address needs
• Need for Consistent, Local Support
• Homeowners must understand their contribution to the problem

• Impacts to homeowners
  • Capital cost
  • Monthly WW charges
  • Disruption during construction
  • Timing – “I just replaced my drainfield”

• Consistency in multi-year implementation
PUBLIC EDUCATION

• The finances
  • Amortization of assessment/ connection fees
  • Monthly charges
  • Hardship programs
• Guest speakers
• Be proactive with the media
• Find your local sparkplug
• Getting everyone on the same team
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ONGOING PROLIFERATION OF SEPTIC TANKS

- Encourage state level cooperation
- Engage your local county health departments
- Local ordinances and developer agreements can minimize the addition of more septic systems
The intent of the document is not to offer a comprehensive study, but collect thoughts, ideas, and resources from multiple sources in a single location.
FUN FACTS... SOME THINGS WE LEARNED

• The first question is always about money... by far the biggest issue
• Every community is different in what they will and will not accept, particularly when it comes to what they are willing to pay
• Political consistency is essential for success
• There is definitely a lack of understanding on the part of the public as to the impact of septic systems
• Grant funding is more available for wastewater than water
SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

We must work together to protect precious waterways
- connect to centralized sewer
- upgrade to an advanced septic system
- regularly maintain your current septic system
- work with your local government to be part of the solution
QUESTIONS