

Attachment 'A' **Status Report on Septic System Program** **of the Public Health Department**

Since the adoption of the County Code revisions in April 1999, the County Public Health Department has been working with Project Clean Water Stakeholders, the Septic System Working Group, and various County agencies to discuss how Santa Barbara County can enhance the onsite sewage disposal system ("septic system") permitting and oversight program. The County Code revisions adopted in 1999 established requirements that when a septic system is serviced, an inspection is conducted. The findings from the inspection are then required to be reported to the Public Health Department; over the last two years, much information has been gained on the state of septic system failures that can be found county-wide as well as those septic systems that are not experiencing operational problems. In the current County Code, a septic system failure is defined as:

“Failure of an onsite sewage disposal system means the occurrence of one or more of the following:

- (a) Discharge into the onsite sewage disposal system results in back-up of sewage in to the structure served.
- (b) Discharge of septic tank effluent on to the surface of the ground or into any surface water.
- (c) The disposal field requires modification in order to adequately absorb septic tank effluent.
- (d) The septic tank requires pumping more frequently than once every two years.

In addition, septic tank pumping companies are finding and reporting conditions of sewage surfacing around manholes of septic tanks, indicating in some instances that the sewage disposal field is not able to accept effluent at the time of the inspection.

Through funding of a Geographic Information System (GIS) program, the Public Health Department is currently undertaking the “hard file” conversion of years of septic system permit history in to the Department’s permit software program and the GIS database.

Contained within this status report is a general listing of activities that the Department has undertaken this fiscal year in the septic system program.

August 2000---continuing

The first of two draft ordinances is a comprehensive onsite sewage disposal system ordinance (previously referred to in four hearings before the Board of Supervisors as Phase III of the County Code revisions relative to septic systems). This ordinance has been reviewed and revised by Public Health Department staff and will be taken to a Technical Review Committee in May 2001 for full review prior to presentation to your Board. In addition to review by the Technical Review Committee, Project Clean Water stakeholders and other interested parties will be given the opportunity to provide input in to the draft ordinance process prior to the first reading of the ordinance before the County Board of Supervisors.

August 2000---Ongoing Activity

Owing to the support of the Board of Supervisors and local stakeholders, the Public Health Department has been able to make great strides in the improvement of record keeping and identification of parcels utilizing septic systems for sewage disposal throughout the County.

Environmental Health Services continues to collect site specific septic system information such as soil conditions, information obtained from voluntary servicing, and complaint response regarding septic system failures. This process has been moving slowly mainly due to the lack of staffing and resources. This process will be greatly enhanced and accelerated as a result of the county-wide septic system sanitary survey. The final report will provide analysis of regional and specific areas that are problematic for septic system disposal and will make recommendations on the feasibility of sewer conversion projects, areas requiring advanced treatment options or the areas where a mandatory servicing and inspection program would be beneficial.

August–December 2000

The second draft ordinance is a proposed mandatory servicing and inspection program for onsite sewage disposal systems. This ordinance was drafted and reviewed by the Septic System Working Group and recommendations on the language in the ordinance was provided back to Public Health Department staff. Public Health Department staff does not recommend adoption of this ordinance at this time.

September 2000---Ongoing Activity

In addition to activities related to ordinance development, the Public Health Department is undertaking the following activities:

- Development and distribution of informational and educational materials related to operation and maintenance.
- Enhancement of existing Geographic Information System and ongoing conversion of septic system historical data to an electronic format to further enhance analysis (see discussion regarding the Sanitary Survey Project).

December 2000, January, February and March 2001 (ongoing activity)

Environmental Health Services Director met with the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health, Federal Environmental Protection Agency staff, and staff of the Water Resources Control Board to discuss AB 885 statewide regulations for the siting, construction and operation of onsite sewage disposal systems.

December 2000

Environmental Health Services staff and staff of the Comprehensive Planning Division of Planning and Development Department met to discuss general environmental impact issue concerns with the septic-to-sewer conversion program.

January 10, 2001

Environmental Health Services staff met with the Sanitary Area Managers Association (SAMA) to discuss the proposed septic-to-sewer conversion program and to seek support. SAMA representatives were generally in favor of the program and the City of Santa Barbara and the Montecito Sanitary District are currently offering reductions in sewer connection fees as an incentive to homeowner conversions. The incentives have been moderately well received in the Montecito Sanitary District area where twenty five homeowners have taken advantage of the incentive and hooked up to the sanitary sewer system.

January 2001

A check in the amount of \$2,000,000 was received by the Public Health Department from the State Water Resources Control Board as a one-time State Budget Act appropriation. Out of the \$2 million, \$250,000 is to be used for the county-wide septic system sanitary survey project and the remaining \$1.75 million is directed to the Septic-to-Sewer Conversion Program (low interest loan program for homeowners).

February 6, 2001

A hearing before the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors was held pertaining to the Project Clean Water status report. At the hearing, the Board of Supervisors requested the Public Health Department work with the County Administrator's Office to explore funding options for the coastal sewerage projects being proposed by the Carpinteria Sanitary District: Rincon Point, Sandyland Cove, Sand Point Road, Padaro Lane and Beach Club Road.

February 2001

Public Health Department staff had several meetings with the County Administrator's Office, County Counsel, Carpinteria Sanitary District staff, and Heal the Ocean to discuss the septic-to-sewer conversion program and the potential for expansion of use of the State funding.

February 7, 2001

The State Water Resources Control Board was contacted to determine if Santa Barbara County Public Health Department could request amendments to modify the approved workplan components for the Septic-to-Sewer Conversion Program to reapportion monies between designated categories to potentially provide funding for environmental impact studies for sewerage projects. State staff was receptive to a request for a modification, and advised Public Health Department staff that if the modifications were consistent with the original intent of the allocation, they may be able to approve it.

February 9, 2001

Environmental Health Services staff met with the City of Solvang and the Santa Ynez Community Services District regarding potential septic-to-sewer conversion projects as well as the potential for the Solvang wastewater treatment plant expansion.

February 13, 2001

Environmental Health Services met with the Housing Finance and Development Division of the County Treasurer-Tax Collector. Various potential program components were discussed and explored.

February 19, 2001

Environmental Health Services drafted initial criteria for loan eligibility as well as contacted other County agencies to discuss potential program components for septic-to-sewer conversion program.

March 1, 2001

Public Health Department received a written request for assistance in funding from the Carpinteria Sanitary District for \$67,000. The Carpinteria Sanitary District has applied for Proposition 13 funding under two categories for funding to be used for the focused environmental impact studies.

March 2001

The Public Health Department recently circulated a Request for Proposal (RFP) to over forty (40) firms with previous experience in onsite wastewater management and/or Geographic Information Systems for the \$250,000 Sanitary Survey Project. Five submittals were received. The Public Health Department evaluated these submittals and held interviews with the top two companies. The Public Health Department will be returning to your Board after a consultant has been selected and upon completion of contract negotiations.

The overall goals of the Sanitary Survey are:

- Assess the impacts of existing septic systems on surface and groundwater
- Identify areas of the County that are problematic for septic system disposal
- Determine the conditions of septic systems surveyed
- Identify areas of the County where mandatory servicing and inspection of septic systems is recommended
- Identify areas of the County where conversion of septic systems to sanitary sewer disposal is warranted and feasible.

The Project will be comprised of five elements:

1. Historical Review of existing septic system information, hydrologic and geologic information that may impact septic system siting.
2. Design and implementation of a survey of a representative sample of septic system homeowners as to the current conditions of their systems
3. Based upon information acquired in the first two elements, field surveys will be conducted to verify information and determine potential for surface and groundwater from septic system disposal in the areas selected.
4. Targeted investigations will be carried out to verify potential impacts and areas of potential septic system failures. These investigations may include water quality analysis, dye testing and possible use of bacteriophages.
5. Analyze data obtained from previous element and generate a final report that identifies conditions of septic systems studied, identifies where mandatory servicing and inspection are warranted, designates areas of the County that are problematic for septic system use, assesses the impact of septic systems on surface water and groundwater and provides recommendations for the potential connection of septic system areas to sanitary sewer disposal. The report will form the basis for long-range planning for septic system siting.

June 2001

The Public Health Department anticipates beginning the Sanitary Survey in June 2001. The tasks of the project will likely include exploration of septic systems during worst case scenarios, such as during rainy, saturated soil conditions. Therefore, the overall project completion date is late Spring/early Summer of 2002.