



Title: Private Well and Septic System Management Education

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Organization: University of Maryland Cooperative Extension

State: MD **Region:** Mid-Atlantic

Year of Funding:

Theme: Drinking Water and Human Health

Situation: Private septic systems are known polluters of the environment. Most homes with septic systems also have wells for drinking water. It is imperative that both systems are maintained since they are in close proximity. Urban dwellers are moving to rural areas and are not familiar with these systems. Realtors and builders selling the homes do not provide information on these systems. Worse, the word-of-mouth information people pass along is usually incorrect and harmful.

Objectives: Many homeowners lack education on their role in water quality degradation and how normal daily activities within homes and yards can contribute to water quality problems. Homeowners need to understand how water moves through the earth and how a failing or neglected septic system or well could contaminate their drinking water and affect personal health and the environment.

Methods: Workshops are presented to more than 1500 homeowners each year throughout the State of Maryland. Participants are taught ground and surface water hydrology (using a visual groundwater model), how they affect water quality, and well and septic system management (using PowerPoint presentations). Information is also provided on handy file-folder format fact sheets.

Partnerships: Maryland Master Gardeners. Maryland Realtor Commission. Maryland Realtor Associations. County Health Departments. Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy Teams. State Water Quality Advisory Committee. On-Site Sewage Disposal Task Force.

Research: Incorporated within these workshops is information concerning the need for updated, nitrogen reducing technologies in septic systems. Legislation has been submitted to require nitrogen-reducing technology, but to date has been defeated. This is mainly attributed to misinformation and the lack of understanding by public officials and the general public.

Resources: In addition to educating homeowners and Realtors, Volunteer Master Gardeners are being trained take this information to homeowners. Over 400 Master Gardeners have been trained.

Results: Evaluations are being collected on change of behaviors and money-saved. Site visits and emails are being tallied and evaluated from the Internet. (Over 35,000 people have visited this information per year.) Through this program, many of the groups that originally fought the proposed septic system legislation have accepted the need for the changes now. When legislation is re-introduced, hopefully the public's understanding will allow for the changes necessary.



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