



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

Advances in the Onsite Wastewater Industry in Nebraska through Research and Extension

Nebraska has an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 onsite wastewater treatment systems, with an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 systems that are repaired, altered, modified or installed each year. Nationwide, estimates indicate that up to 40% of existing systems may not be functioning properly. Anecdotal evidence in Nebraska indicates that it is following the national trend. Therefore, considerable amounts of wastewater are not being properly treated, leading to potential environmental and human health risk. The general approach to advance the onsite industry in Nebraska involves a multi-step process spread out over the last decade. While there are many important steps and key elements to the plan, the focus of this poster will be on significant University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension efforts, implemented in partnership with stakeholders and clientele.

1997 - 2003: UNL Extension facilitated the organization of the Nebraska Onsite Wastewater Task Force comprised of state and local regulators and educators. The Task Force secured a USEPA Section 319 grant through the NDEQ. As a result, the Task Force, with leadership from UNL Extension, advanced the onsite wastewater industry by developing educational materials, (11 Extension NebGuides and 1 Extension Circular), developing curriculum and presenting educational workshops (17 for industry professionals and 10 for consumers), and delivering an initial conference for the industry. The Task Force identified and helped organize industry leaders, who formed and provided leadership for the Nebraska Onsite Waste Water Association (NOWWA).

2003 - 2006: Legislation introduced by NOWWA resulted in significant changes designed to advance the industry, including the requirement for certification-by-exam of onsite professionals. UNL Extension developed curriculum for certification categories and delivered classes across the state. As a result, 86 percent of individuals completing certification classes passed their certification exam(s). In addition, a high percentage of individuals completing a follow-up evaluation had implemented behavior changes that would result in environmental and human health risk reduction.

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