

The Local Board of Health Environmental Health Primer Wastewater Factsheet



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Background

- Wastewater can contain microbiological disease agents (pathogens), chemical poisons (toxins), and/or other biological, chemical, and physical components that may disturb natural aquatic ecosystems or cause human health problems.
- The public can be exposed to wastewater pathogens and toxins through several routes, including drinking water (ingestion), swimming (dermal exposure), or breathing (inhalation).
- Twenty-five to 35% of wastewater currently generated and up to 40% of new construction wastewater is discharged to residential on-site (decentralized) wastewater treatment systems.
- Increasing construction in suburban, nonsewered areas has resulted in increased on-site wastewater volume generation and associated public health risks.
- Proper siting of on-site wastewater treatment systems is crucial to protecting groundwater and surface water quality.
- In rural areas, where many on-site wastewater treatment systems are used, a local health agency is often the only direct regulatory authority that provides oversight and enforcement of wastewater management.

Board of Health Actions

- Ensure safe wastewater management in the community by remedying existing problems and identifying potential problems before they exist, specifically through regular assessment and evaluation of wastewater programs.
- Be involved in the assessment of the community's wastewater needs, the development of policies or programs to meet those needs, and assurance that the necessary personnel, training, and resources are available to support programs.
- Respond to and investigate wastewater discharges to municipal wastewater systems.

Resources for Continuing Education

- National Association of Local Boards of Health. (2006). *Local Board of Health Guide to On-Site Wastewater Treatment Systems*.
- National Association of Local Boards of Health. (2011). Wastewater. In *The Local Board of Health Environmental Health Primer* (2nd ed.).
- National Environmental Services Center. National Small Flows Clearinghouse. Available at <http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/wastewater.cfm>
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. Office of Wastewater Management. Available at <http://www.epa.gov/owm/>

© 2011 National Association of Local Boards of Health