

Agenda for Home Sewage Treatment Systems

Home sewage treatment systems that discharge to waterways can be a major source of bacteria and dissolved phosphorus, leading to public health advisories, recreational use impairment, and toxic algae blooms in the western basin of Lake Erie. On-site sewage treatment systems that comply with today's standards can be an effective and economical means of treating sewage, but often are less effective as they age. Soil conditions in much of northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan have inadequate drainage, high seasonal or perched water tables, shallow bedrock, or karst bedrock formations, also reducing the treatment capability of many systems.

Small, older communities typically were created with dense clusters of small residential lots that formed a high concentration of treatment systems. Home sewage systems typically have a life-span of 25 to 30 years and small lots mean there is not adequate room on the property to install an on-lot replacement system. As a result, homes in these communities are unlikely to have home sewage treatment systems that meet current standards.

Recommended Policies for Home Sewage Treatment

Federal and State

- Recognize as established law (Ohio Revised Code 6117.51 and Ohio Administrative Code 3701-29-06) that an occupied structure such as a residence or a business is required to tap into the public sanitary sewer if it is considered "available and accessible." The default distance for connection is where any part of the structure is within 200 feet of the nearest sanitary sewer right-of-way. However, individual counties may require systems to tap-in beyond the 200-foot state requirement.
- Recognize the public sanitary sewer system as "best available technology" for sewage treatment as stated in OAC 3745-42-07. Where sanitary sewers are available and accessible, existing home sewage treatment systems shall be abandoned in favor of connecting to the public sewer and proposed structures shall be required to connect to the sewer.
- Discourage legislation that allows individual properties to opt out of the sewer tap requirement. Opt-outs challenge the financial viability of a public sewer system and may make extension of the sewer to the area cost-prohibitive to other residents.
- Use the 208 Plan boundaries proactively to inform builders and homeowners of facility planning areas where they may be required to tap into sewers in the future.

Regional

- TMACOG recommends requiring inspections of septic systems upon transfer of real estate.
- TMACOG supports enforcement of regulations currently implemented by local health departments which require all sewage treatment systems to have an Operation and Maintenance Permit as required in Ohio Administrative Code 3701-29. TMACOG further encourages local health departments to consider funding and implementation of Operation and Maintenance programs a priority.
- TMACOG recommends support for educational programs that teach homeowners how to safely maintain a home sewage treatment system.
- Septic tanks or individual household sewage treatment systems should not be permitted for new subdivisions within a facility planning area boundary. New subdivisions should connect to public sewers and be served by the facility planning area's designated wastewater treatment plant.

Funding

- TMACOG supports financial assistance to homeowners based on economic need for sewer taps, repair, or replacement of sewage treatment systems.
- The state should provide funding for county health departments to update and digitize information on septic systems. Very few county health departments have current and complete information on septic systems and most records are still on paper. Health departments will need financial assistance to establish complete electronic records of existing systems and utilize computer mapping technology to manage them effectively.
- TMACOG encourages funding for health districts to implement programs to inspect home sewage treatment systems to ensure their proper operation and to identify necessary repairs to protect water quality, human health, and the financial interest of existing and prospective homeowners.
- Restore funding to the sewer Rotary Fund to help pay for sewers in agricultural areas. The purpose is to eliminate existing water quality problems without requiring unserved parcels to pay tap-in fees.
- TMACOG recommends priority financial assistance to local jurisdictions to fund construction of sewer extensions including the cost of sewer laterals, based on financial need and degree of watershed impairment.