

### **Tool: Maintenance and Inspection of On-site Wastewater Systems**

Evaluate the alternative maintenance practices and inspection procedures associated with onsite wastewater systems (i.e. septic tanks) to reduce illicit discharges.

#### **What is a potential Task Force recommendation for implementation of this tool at the conclusion of this process?**

A potential recommendation for this tool would be an initial evaluation of the current maintenance and inspection program that includes a comparison against other peer communities. A stakeholders group that represents interested parties in both the municipalities and the County would be convened to review the findings of the initial evaluation and determine an ultimate course of action for the maintenance and inspection program. In parallel to the development of revised maintenance and inspection procedures, a database and tracking system for all onsite wastewater systems in the County would be developed to identify all possible sources of illicit discharges.

Considering that there are an estimated 60,000 onsite wastewater systems in the County, it was suggested that inspection and maintenance activities should be prioritized based on an assessment of risk to environmental resources (both groundwater and surface water). System located near environmental resources may require a higher level of service than those that are lower risk facilities.

In addition to the inspection and maintenance procedures, the Task Force suggested that targeted public education materials should be developed and distributed to those that own a home with an on-site wastewater system. The materials should educate the owner on the components of the system, location of the system, and the required maintenance activities for the system.

#### **What problems identified by the Task Force (Objectives) does this tool address?**

Addressing the potential for illicit discharges from onsite wastewater systems will improve and protect the quality of water in Wake County streams. As such, this tool addresses seven of the 14 Task Force objective statements.

#### **What is the minimum regulatory requirement, if any, for this tool?**

EPA recognizes effluent from improperly functioning onsite wastewater systems as a form of illicit discharge subject to Phase II regulation, and State of NC Session Law 2006-246, Section 9 (e) requires development and implementation of an oversight program to ensure proper operation and maintenance of onsite wastewater treatment systems for domestic wastewater. North Carolina Administrative Code (15A NCAC 18A) mandates operational inspections of systems employing mechanical components or pretreatment and disposing of large volumes of wastewater or industrial process wastewater.

**How is this tool currently applied within Wake County?**

The County currently carries out operational inspections on about 500 of the most complex and largest onsite systems, but does not inspect the additional 7,000 – 8,000 mechanical systems. The response to operational issues on the remaining 52,000 onsite systems is largely performed on a complaint-only basis.

**Is there an opportunity for collaboration on the implementation of this tool?**

Session law requires Phase II municipalities to have a program and states that the municipality may coordinate the program with the County to prepare and execute it. Therefore, the opportunity exists for the County and municipalities to collaborate on content and phasing of any program that addresses maintenance and oversight of on-site waste water systems.

**What is the expected outcome of this potential recommendation?**

Alternative maintenance practices and inspection procedures would be developed for onsite wastewater systems (i.e. septic tanks) with the goal of reducing, to the maximum extent practicable, illicit discharges to groundwater and streams from leaking/failing septic systems.