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Potential rural home builders or buyers must do their homework

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Ohio's new Sewage Treatment System (STS) Rules took effect on January 1, 2007. The result of the first statewide STS rule update since 1977, these rules promise to provide a much greater degree of protection to Ohio's surface waters, many of which have been excessively polluted by discharges from large numbers of sub-standard household sewage treatment systems, commonly referred to as septic systems.

Pollution of surface waters by poorly functioning septic systems not only has a negative impact on fish and other aquatic life, but can also threaten the health of humans who come into contact with the polluted waters during work or recreation.

What do the new STS rules mean for rural homeowners in Van Wert County? If an existing household has a working system that is not failing or known to be causing a nuisance, the rules require no action on the part of the homeowner. If the system fails structurally or otherwise stops working, then it must be replaced with a new system that meets the requirements of the new STS rules.

In this situation, the first priority of the new STS rules is to keep the final dispersal of the treated wastewater on the same property where the waste water is generated. In other words, the system treats the water and disperses it into the soil on the property, without the benefit of any direct artificial drainage, such as a drainage tile.

This type of system is known as an "onsite" or "absorption" system. In order to determine the type and size of system required to do this, the homeowner must contact a soils professional to conduct a site and soil evaluation. If there is not suitable soil or sufficient area available on the property to support installation of an onsite system, then a discharging system can be permitted, provided that it meets the requirements set forth by Ohio EPA in the newly-created National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for discharging household sewage treatment systems. The general type of system needed is determined through the site and soil evaluation process.

The next step is to contract with a STS designer to provide a detailed design plan for the new system. The design plan is then submitted to the Health Department along with an application for site review. If, upon review, the Health Department determines that the design plan meets all rule requirements, then an installation permit is issued.

What do the new STS rules mean for those who may want to build a home in rural Van Wert County?

The overall process is much the same as that described for replacement of a failed existing septic system, with one major exception. For all new construction on new lots, no discharging STS are allowed under the new rules. As a result, new building lots can only be approved where soil absorption is possible. Not all soils on all sites in Van Wert County will support a soil absorption system.

For this reason, anyone who is considering creating a new rural lot for construction of a new home is advised to consult with the Van Wert County Health Department and arrange for a site and soil evaluation prior to purchasing the property or even spending time and money to have a lot surveyed. It is hoped that this practice will help to prevent would-be land buyers from wasting their valuable resources on land that may not be suitable for construction of a new home.

For more information on the new STS rules, visit www.vanwertcountyhealth.org or contact Jason Menchhofer at 419-238-0808 ext. 108.

PLEASE VISIT WWW.VANWERTCOUNTYHEALTH.ORG
FOR LOTS OF DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE NEW STS RULES