

Summary of Rhode Island Municipal Onsite Wastewater Programs

April 2008

The R.I. Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has established minimum standards for onsite wastewater treatment systems throughout the state- *Rules Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems*. The rules are available online at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/pubs/regs/regs/water/owts08.pdf>. DEM also encourages municipalities to establish local programs to meet the onsite wastewater needs of each town. Cities and towns have authority to set local standards for septic systems that are more stringent than state standards. Where established, these standards are part of municipal septic system management programs. These programs have been created with the assistance of State Bond funds or Federal Nonpoint Source funds distributed through DEM grants (with the exception of New Shoreham, where an EPA grant was used). Towns use these funds to develop an onsite wastewater management plan (OWMP) designed to meet local needs. An OWMP describes the elements of the municipal management program for septic systems. Program elements may include, for example, passing an ordinance requiring system inspections, enhancing homeowner education, or specifying stronger treatment requirements in environmentally sensitive areas. Once approved by DEM, an OWMP allows towns to participate in the Community Septic System Loan Program (CSSLP). CSSLP funds come from the State Revolving Fund and are administered by the R.I. Housing and Mortgage Financing Agency. Money is used by participating towns to provide low interest loans to homeowners to cover the costs associated with septic system repairs and upgrades.

This document provides a brief summary of local onsite wastewater management in Rhode Island. Nine towns have an approved OWMP; eight participate in the CSSLP. Eleven towns have a draft OWMP. The following cities and towns are primarily served by sewers and have not initiated local efforts to manage septic systems: Barrington, Central Falls, East Providence, Lincoln, Newport, North Providence, Pawtucket, Providence, Warren, West Warwick, and Woonsocket.

Bristol: Much of the Town of Bristol is served by municipal sewers, but some onsite systems are in use. The town received a \$10,000 grant from DEM to support development of an OWMP. The Plan has been approved by DEM and the town is implementing its management program. The plan calls for voluntary system inspections and homeowner education.

Burrillville: Burrillville is primarily served by onsite wastewater systems but there is no municipal program for these systems. The town and DEM are currently working on a grant agreement for \$10,000 to support the development of an OWMP.

Charlestown: Charlestown has an approved OWMP and has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town has a wastewater management ordinance requiring inspection of onsite systems. The town also maintains a web-based septic system inventory and tracking program, and has instituted a cesspool phaseout program. The town currently has a \$25,000 grant from DEM for the purpose of implementing the town's OWMP. Funds from this grant are used to reimburse homeowners for some of the costs associated with locating systems for inspection, installing tank access risers, and retrofitting effluent filters. Charlestown also participates in the CSSLP.

Coventry: Coventry has an approved OWMP and participates in the CSSLP. The approved OWMP proposes phased implementation of a management program based on improving homeowner awareness, creating a septic system inventory, and promoting voluntary system inspections. The management program focuses on making financial assistance available to repair or replace failed systems and cesspools. Through CSSLP, loans of up to \$10,000 are available to residents who meet the town's eligibility criteria.

Cranston: The City of Cranston is primarily served by sewers, but a small number of onsite systems are in use. Cranston has a draft OWMP but current municipal management activities are limited and work on the plan has been suspended. The OWMP is based on homeowner education to encourage septic system maintenance and system inventories to track performance. The plan also calls for phased implementation.

Cumberland: Cumberland does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time. The town received a grant award from DEM in 1999 but no grant agreement has been reached and no OWMP has been developed.

East Greenwich: East Greenwich has a municipal sewer system for the area east of Route 2, serving approximately two-thirds of the town's population. The rest of the town is served by onsite systems. East Greenwich has a reimbursement program available to defray up to \$2000 of the costs to repair or replace a failing onsite system. The town does not have an approved OWMP and does not participate in CSSLP.

Exeter: Exeter has partnered with Richmond and Hopkinton and received grant funding from DEM for the purpose of developing an OWMP encompassing the three towns. Each town receives \$25,000 from the grant for a total amount of \$75,000. A draft plan has been reviewed by DEM and returned to the towns for revisions.

Foster: Foster has partnered with Scituate and received \$27,700 in grant funding for the development of an OWMP covering both towns. A draft plan has been reviewed by DEM and returned to the town for revision.

Glocester: Glocester has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The program was developed as part of a DEM Nonpoint Source grant for the Chepachet Village Wastewater Demonstration Project. The town has an ordinance specifying more stringent standards than state regulations for septic system design and location as well as required system inspections. Glocester also participates in the CSSLP.

Hopkinton: See Exeter.

Jamestown: Jamestown has an approved OWMP and has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town participates in the CSSLP. Jamestown has an onsite wastewater management ordinance requiring septic system inspections at regular intervals. The town also has a High Groundwater Overlay Zone specifying additional septic system siting and treatment requirements. Jamestown uses a web-based inventory and tracking computer program to monitor septic system maintenance and track performance.

Johnston: Johnston has an approved OWMP and is participating in the CSSLP. The town has a municipal onsite wastewater management ordinance that requires more stringent standards than state regulations for system design and installation. Septic system inspections are also required.

Little Compton: Little Compton is in the process of developing an OWMP assisted, in part, by a \$25,000 grant from DEM. A draft plan has been submitted to DEM and is currently under review. The proposed OWMP will utilize homeowner education to encourage voluntary septic system inspections and maintenance.

Middletown: Middletown currently has no municipal onsite wastewater management program.

Narragansett: Narragansett has an approved OWMP and is working towards participation in the CSSLP. The town does not have an onsite wastewater management ordinance, but the zoning ordinance sets more stringent standards than the state regulations for septic system siting. The town utilities ordinance requires septic system pumping at least every 4 years.

New Shoreham: The Town of New Shoreham has an approved OWMP and has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town has an onsite wastewater management ordinance requiring system inspections and maintenance. A cesspool phaseout program is ongoing. New Shoreham's zoning ordinance specifies treatment standards based on location and soil conditions. The town's onsite wastewater program was developed as part of an EPA demonstration project grant. The town also participates in the CSSLP.

North Kingstown: The Town of North Kingstown has an approved OWMP and has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town has an onsite wastewater management ordinance requiring septic system inspection and maintenance at regular intervals. The town participates in the CSSLP with loan funds administered by the Water Department.

North Smithfield: North Smithfield has received a \$10,000 grant from DEM for the development of an OWMP.

Portsmouth: Portsmouth does not currently have a municipal onsite wastewater management program. The town has a draft OWMP, but further work has been suspended pending a decision on the future direction of wastewater management. The town is evaluating several options, including both expanded sewer service and enhanced management of onsite systems.

Richmond: See Exeter.

Scituate: See Foster.

Smithfield: Smithfield has received a \$10,000 grant from DEM for the development of an OWMP. A draft plan has been reviewed by DEM and returned to the town for revisions. The draft plan recommends creation of a wastewater management district encompassing the unsewered areas of town. The OWMP focuses on encouraging septic system maintenance through homeowner education. An onsite wastewater management ordinance is not proposed.

South Kingstown: South Kingstown has an approved OWMP and has an onsite wastewater management program in place. The town has a wastewater management ordinance requiring inspection of onsite systems. The town requires cesspools discovered via the inspection program to be upgraded within 5 years. Cesspools must be upgraded within 12 months of the sale of a property. The South Kingstown zoning ordinance contains more stringent setbacks from natural features than the state requirements. South Kingstown uses a computerized inventory and tracking program developed by the town's information technology department. The town has a \$25,000 grant from DEM for the purpose of implementing the OWMP, including providing reimbursement to homeowners for the installation of tank access risers and effluent filters. South Kingstown participates in the CSSLP.

Tiverton: Tiverton has an approved OWMP and is in the process of creating an onsite wastewater management program. The town participates in the CSSLP. The Tiverton Town Council has recently passed an onsite wastewater management ordinance. The ordinance requires septic system inspection and maintenance and mandates the installation of access risers and effluent filters when systems are repaired or upgraded. Tiverton received a grant from DEM for \$35,000 to support development of the OWMP.

Warwick: Much of Warwick is sewerred, but a significant number of onsite systems remain. The city is in the process of implementing a mandatory sewer tie-in program. Lots with access to municipal sewers will be required to abandon their onsite system and connect to the sewer line. The city is reallocating municipal bond funding from the underutilized Onsite Rehabilitation Program to support the sewer tie-in program.

West Greenwich: The Town of West Greenwich does not currently have a municipal onsite wastewater management program.

Westerly: The Town of Westerly has a municipal sewer system serving the downtown area, corresponding to approximately half the town's population. The rest of the town is

served by onsite systems. Westerly has an approved OWMP developed using a \$35,000 Onsite Wastewater Management Pilot Project grant from DEM. The OWMP calls for creation of a wastewater management district for areas not currently served by sewers. Within this district, the Town will create a homeowner education and outreach program and create a computerized inventory containing results of voluntary inspections. The town is working towards participation in the CSSLP.