



# NORTHWEST REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE



June 18, 2007

Rachel Carson State Office Bldg.  
P.O. Box 8774  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8774  
Attn: John McHale

Dear Mr. McHale:

The DEP Northwest Regional Roundtable assists both citizens and DEP in the resolution of regional environmental issues. Recently the Roundtable has been approached by citizens who have raised many serious concerns regarding the practicality and legality of their communities' mandated public sewage systems.

Acting on behalf of these concerned citizens and desiring to assist DEP in more effectively protecting the environment, the Roundtable offers these suggestions for reforming the application and approval process of municipal sewage disposal systems:

- 1) Require the categorization of sewage system "confirmed malfunction". Establish criteria for the seriousness of the malfunction (e.g., imminent health or environmental risk, potential health or environmental risk, unlikely health or environmental risk). Included in this recommendation is a requirement that during the application process and prior to system approval DEP identify and document in public records where public water supplies and supply lines are located.
- 2) When documented problems arise in a municipality concerning on-lot sewage, the municipality should mandate septic tank pumping ordinances as a first option. Many of the septic systems currently in place would operate properly if they were maintained. These ordinances should be passed and enforced prior to the development of a public sewage system.
- 3) Mandate public sewage hookups only as a last resort.
- 4) Consider the option of bestowing DEP with greater oversight authority in deciding what areas in a municipality should be serviced with public sewage and when conflict-of-interest issues become evident for municipal officials charged with designing the system.
- 5) Sewage hookups should not be required solely for the purpose of economic benefit to others in the community.

- 6) Explore on-lot technologies and expedite the perfection and acceptance of new technologies to give landowners more options in choosing and implementing sewage treatment methods. Educate citizens about alternate sewage treatment systems and require the notification of citizens as part of the planning process.
- 7) Reiterate that all sunshine, and right-to-know laws be adhered to during the Act 537 application process. Require as part of the Act 537 application that public notice be made and copies of these notices be provided as part of the complete application (similar to public notices for proposed air quality permits).
- 8) Require, as part of the complete application, that individual property owners be notified in writing and a public meeting be held before public sewage hookups may be mandated. Develop some method of recourse for property owners to apply and argue for an exemption if their systems meet certain performance criteria.

The citizens of northwestern Pennsylvania and the Roundtable thank you for considering these suggestions. The Roundtable welcomes your responses indicating what action(s) may be taken to implement these suggestions. If clarification or elaboration is needed on any suggestion or concern, please contact us.

Sincerely,

G. Warren Smith, Chair  
DEP Northwest Regional Roundtable  
101 Ayyar Court  
Slippery Rock, PA 16057

Lorna Slater, Vice-Chair  
DEP Northwest Regional Roundtable

cc: Citizens Advisory Council  
Environmental Quality Board  
DEP Northwest Regional Office