



News for Immediate Release

April 18, 2013

DEP to Extend Public Comment Period, Host Webinar about Onlot Septic System Guidance

Guidance Developed in Response to Court Decision

Harrisburg – The Department of Environmental Protection announced today that it will accept comments for an additional 30 days on draft technical guidance describing how onlot sewage disposal systems can be sited in watersheds that are designated high-quality and exceptional value. The comment period, which was originally slated to close May 1, will be open through June 3.

The agency also announced it will host a webinar on Tuesday, April 23, from 2 to 3 p.m., to present the guidance and answer questions. DEP will also expand its outreach and discussion efforts with local government organizations.

“Good government, sound policy and public involvement are core tenets of this administration,” DEP Acting Secretary Chris Abruzzo said. “We want to make sure that everyone has a chance to be heard; we want reasonable development to be able to occur; and we want to make sure this state’s water quality is protected. If there are different approaches than the one we have proposed, we want to hear them.”

The draft technical guidance outlines an approach using best management practices, such as the number of septic systems per acre on a proposed development, or nitrate removal technology, to demonstrate that the state’s most pristine waters are protected. Under Pennsylvania law, these high-quality and exceptional value watersheds are afforded special protections, known as anti-degradation requirements. DEP is required by federal law to ensure the water quality of such watersheds is protected and maintained.

The technical guidance, as drafted, is prospective and would only apply to onlot septic systems for projects that have not yet secured sewage planning approval from DEP and local government organizations. The technical guidance will not affect projects that have already been approved.

This technical guidance is needed because the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board ruled that the modeling DEP relied on to approve the use of septic systems near high-quality and exceptional value watersheds did not adequately demonstrate the waterways are protected. The ruling set a high legal and scientific standard for review of sewage facilities planning in special protection watersheds.

This draft guidance lays out one approach to address developers' uncertainty. If it is finalized, DEP will favorably view planning modules submitted in accordance with the guidance and will also consider alternative approaches as sewage planners seek approval from the agency.

Written comments on the guidance should be sent in writing by June 3 to Thomas Starosta at DEP's Bureau of Point and Non-Point Source Management, Division of Planning and Permits, P. O. Box 8774, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8774, or via email to tstarosta@pa.gov.

For more information or to register for the webinar, visit www.dep.state.pa.us and click the "DEP Webinars" button, then "Draft Technical Guidance for Onlot Sewage Systems in HQ/EV" on the right-hand side of that page. The webinar will be recorded and posted on this webpage for future viewing.

Media contact: Kevin Sunday, 717-787-1323

###