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Contact:
Jennifer Hause
(304) 293-4191 ext. 5564
jhause@mail.wvu.edu

NESC Helps Expand National Partnership

WVU Center Joins EPA and 14 Other Organizations to Address Wastewater Challenges

Morgantown, W.Va.—In 2005, West Virginia University’s National Environmental Services Center (NESC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), along with seven other national organizations, launched an initiative to improve septic systems across the country and reduce pollution in the nation’s waterways. At a November 19, 2008 signing ceremony in Washington D.C., the initial partnership was renewed and six new organizations joined the effort.

“As many as one-fourth of all new houses in the U.S. have septic or other onsite systems to treat their wastewater,” said Gerald Iwan, Ph.D., NESC’s executive director. “But if they aren’t designed, constructed, and managed correctly, these wastewater treatment systems will be destined to join a growing number of septic system malfunctions, currently estimated at between 10 and 50 percent. By joining forces with EPA and our colleagues in similar organizations, we are confident that, collectively, we can help communities address the water quality and public health issues posed by malfunctioning septic systems.”

“Clean water begins at home,” said Benjamin H. Grumbles, EPA’s assistant administrator for water. “Our new partnership for sustaining septic and decentralized wastewater systems will increase awareness, stewardship, and environmental performance.”

NESC’s specific role in the partnership is to serve as a national resource and information clearinghouse; to help communities establish managed systems; to provide technical assistance; to lead training sessions; and to disseminate knowledge through the organization’s publications.

In addition to being an information source, the NESC-sponsored State Onsite Regulators Alliance (SORA)—an organization of state regulators that oversee the regulation, construction, and repair of subsurface disposal systems, along with their local health department partners—joined the national initiative.

“These state regulators have a wealth of practical experience and first-hand information about the environmental and public health issues associated with decentralized waste disposal systems,” Iwan explains. “Since 1999, West Virginia University through NESC and the National Research Center for Coal and Energy, under the leadership of Dr. Richard Bajura, has conducted SORA’s annual conference. Along with state regulators, this national event has included representatives from the private sector that supply the materials and technologies used in the manufacture and installation of subsurface sewage disposal systems.”

In addition to NESC and EPA, the other original partners included: the National Association of Towns and Townships, the National Association of Wastewater Transporters, the National Environmental Health Association, the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association, the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, the Water Environment Federation, and the Consortium of Institutes for Decentralized Wastewater Treatment. Joining the partnership at the November 19 event were: the Water Environment Research Foundation, the Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators, the Groundwater Protection Council, the State Onsite Regulators Alliance, the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, and the Association of State and Territorial Health Organizations.

Based at West Virginia University, NESC is a national leader in the areas of drinking water, wastewater, environmental training, solid waste, infrastructure resilience, and utility management in small and rural communities. NESC’s engineers and technical experts have been at the forefront of septic system technologies for nearly 30 years. To learn more about NESC, call (800) 624-8301 or visit www.nesc.wvu.edu.

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