



Dodge County improving water quality by fixing one septic system at a time

June 2013 Snapshots



Installation of a new septic system in rural Dodge County.

While most people don't give any thought to the toilet water that is flushed away with each trip to the bathroom, Sandy Schaefer does.

Schaefer, an environmental services staff member at Dodge County, is paid to think about wastewater and how it affects Minnesota's lakes and rivers.

"There are 3,328 septic systems in Dodge County," Schaefer said. "Out of those, approximately 65 percent are noncompliant or failing."

Noncompliant or failing systems have less than two feet of soil between the bottom of the drain field and the saturated soil or bedrock.

Septic systems are considered a threat to health and public safety if it discharges to the ground surface or surface water, or if it causes sewage to backup into a house or other establishment. Once a system is considered an imminent threat by the county, landowners have 10 months to fix it.

When septic systems fail, or are noncompliant, untreated wastewater eventually flows into rivers or streams. These systems, especially imminent threat systems, have been found to be a major contributor of fecal coliform pollution to both surface and groundwater in Dodge County.

To address non-compliant septic systems that are impacting local water resources, Schaefer has applied to the Board of Water and Soil Resources' Clean Water Fund grant program. The County has received three grants since 2010, totaling \$180,000.

Utilizing these Clean Water Funds, Dodge County has been able to target grants to fix septic systems for low income landowners who do not have the financial capabilities to fix their systems in a timely manner. In most cases, the landowners who receive a grant through this program would not be eligible to receive other types of financial assistance, including loans.

In order to be eligible for the program, landowners in Dodge County must live in a single-family home and meet certain income qualifications. On average, it costs roughly \$12,500 to fix or replace a septic system.

"Dodge County has helped 15 homeowners replace failing and imminent health threat systems. This has diverted 7,950 gallons of wastewater a day from polluting the environment," Schaefer said. "That's pretty impressive and a big step toward clean water."



For more information, visit http://www.co.dodge.mn.us/eq_septicsystems.html

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