

Onsite Wastewater Assistance Program For Indigent Households in New Mexico



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Public Funding for Wastewater Infrastructure

- Public funding to improve public wastewater infrastructure has been available through grants and loans for decades.
- About 25% of the citizens of USA and NM, however, utilize private onsite wastewater systems.
- These mostly rural homeowners pay taxes that fund improvements to public wastewater infrastructure, but get no benefits in return to improve their onsite wastewater infrastructure.
- Homeowners are solely responsible for paying for improvements to their onsite wastewater systems.



Indigent Households At Risk

- Indigent households with substandard onsite wastewater systems are at risk from public health and safety hazards.
- Homeowners cannot afford repairs.
- No amount of enforcement will fix problems.



Poverty in the U.S.

State	% Population Living in Poverty*
<u>United States</u>	<u>14.2</u>
Mississippi	21.3
Arizona	19.2
New Mexico	19.1
District of Columbia	18.1
Louisiana	18.0
Georgia	17.5
Kentucky	17.3
Texas	17.2
Arkansas	16.5
Alabama	16.1
North Carolina	16.1
Tennessee	16.1

*2008-2010 average <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/incpovhlth/2010/tables.html>

Public Health and Safety Hazards From Substandard Onsite Wastewater Systems

- Groundwater Pollution (most homes served by an onsite wastewater system also utilize an onsite water supply well)
- Surface Water Pollution
- Surfacing Sewage
- Entrapment, Asphyxiation and Drowning



Cesspools

- Illegal since 1973
- Three children have died in cesspools in N.M.
- Many still exist in NM (% of onsite systems)
 - San Patricio 6%
 - Willard 40%
 - Cordova 96%



Substandard Septic Tanks



Failed Systems and Illegal Discharges



Program Being Developed

Since 2007, the State of New Mexico has been exploring options and implementing pilot programs to help indigent households eliminate substandard onsite wastewater systems.



Program Funding

- Legislative appropriations
- Natural resource damage settlements
- Private donations
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a separate program to help very low income households, and we refer clients to USDA.



Program Clients

- Indigent persons or households with income at or below 150% of HUD poverty level.
- USDA uses less than 50% of the area median income.



Program Actions

- Replace substandard onsite wastewater systems with modern systems; or
- Connect households to public sewer, if available.



Action Steps

- Issue contracts with licensed construction companies.
- Recruit, screen and approve applicants.
- Issue work orders to contractor.
- Permit and inspect construction work.
- Contractor is paid after work passes inspection.



Program Accomplishments

- 47 indigent households have been helped:
 - 32 received a modern onsite wastewater system
 - 15 were connected to public sewer.





Before



After

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development

- Very Low Income Housing Repair Program
- Loans and grants available “to make repairs and improvements to make the dwelling more safe and sanitary or to remove health and safety hazards.”
- Very low income defined as below 50 percent of the area median income.
- Grants up to \$7,500 for homeowners 62 years or older.
- Loans up to \$20,000 with 1% interest over 20 years.
- http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HAD-RR_Loans_Grants.html

Acknowledgements

- The N.M. Legislature appropriated funds for a pilot project in Dona Ana County (Sen. Cynthia Nava, 2007), and created the Liquid Waste Disposal System Assistance Fund in the state treasury (Sen. Carlos Sisneros, 2009).
- The Espanola Basin Regional Issues Forum initiated efforts, and provided support, for the 2009 legislation creating the Liquid Waste Disposal System Assistance Fund.
- The New Mexico Office of the Natural Resource Trustee provided funding for an assistance project in the Middle Rio Grande Basin (MRGB).
- The City of Socorro and Valencia County recruited applicants for the MRGB project. Socorro also authorized a heavily discounted sewer connection fee.
- Done Right Construction, LLC, a small family business in Pecos, N.M., is performing the construction work for the MRGB project under a contract with the State of New Mexico.
- The Professional Onsite Wastewater Reuse Association of New Mexico (POWRA-NM) supported the 2009 legislation creating the Liquid Waste Disposal System Assistance Fund. POWRA-NM also donated equipment, materials and manpower to provide an indigent household with a modern onsite wastewater system as a “holiday gift”.



Thank You!



NEW MEXICO OFFICE OF
NATURAL RESOURCES TRUSTEE



Professional Onsite Wastewater Reuse
Association of New Mexico

*Helping on-site wastewater re-use
business people succeed through
advocacy, representation, information,
and professional resources.*

A banner for the Professional Onsite Wastewater Reuse Association of New Mexico. It features a photograph of a white pipe with a rock inside, set against a blue background. The text is in a white, serif font. A small box on the right contains a quote in italics.