

Parke County Non-Partisan
Committee on Political Education
October 3, 2008

Subject: Meeting Minutes – September 27, 2008

The September 27th Meeting was held at the IVY Tech Education Center in Rockville. The topic of this meeting was the Parke County Health Department, its functions and responsibilities. Of most interest were the actions being taken by the Department to assure that the vendors at the upcoming Covered Bridge Festival do not serve food that might make any of us sick.

The featured speaker for the meetings was Diana Peterson, Parke County Health Department Inspector. I would like to offer a special thanks to Diana for her presentation, and open discussion of the challenges facing the Health Department. The County Health Department is charged with the responsibility for Public Health of the Citizens of Parke County.

Diana explained that in her position as County Health Inspector she works for the County Health Board. Diana meets with County Health Officer, Dr. J. F. Swaim weekly to discuss issues faced by the Health Department. She meets quarterly with the Health Board which is comprised of President Mike Deplanty pharmacist, Dr. Dan Dwyer, Dr. Dale Cooper, Jill Rice registered nurse, Lois McGrannahan registered nurse, Joe Seward veterinarian, and Mary Pierce attorney. In the Office of the Health Department, located in the basement of the Court House are 2 full time employees. Diana, the Health Inspector, and one other employee with the responsibility of handling Birth, and Death records as well as Genealogy Research. Assisting the Office on a part time basis is an expert on Bioterrorism, and the County Nurse.

The meeting started with a discussion of Food Safety, and the related task facing the Department with the upcoming Covered Bridge Festival. Diana said that she will have to inspect approximately 200 vendors for proper and safe food handling. She said that the vendors with large menus present the greatest worry since they have the largest amount of food handling to complete while in the County. Each vendor must apply for and receive a Food Permit before being allowed to sell product during the Festival. Each permit includes a visit from Diana to inspect their food handling practices. This is a formidable task for one inspector, but is required to keep us all safe.

We discussed food handling permits and inspections on a continuing basis outside of the just the Festival. The food permits, and the associated rules apply to food served to the public regardless of whether it comes from a commercial restaurant, or a home kitchen. Home kitchens that serve food to the public must be unique from the actual home, and have their own entrance. Every facility in the County that serves food to the public will be inspected once per year minimum. When a permit is purchased the inspection is included. Diana is not required to inform the owner of a food outlet of when she will arrive for an inspection. Exceptions to the permit rules are non-profit

Organizations, Churches, Fire Departments that serve food less than 15 days in a one year period. Although not required by the County, people handling food are urged to obtain a "Safe Serve" License. This license is obtained by taking a course on safe food handling, and then an exam. The license is good for 5 years from the issuance date.

The other responsibility taking a great deal of time for the Health Department is Public Sanitation, or Septic Systems. Due to the requirement that all new Septic Systems be inspected, along with the food handling inspections it was suggested that some consideration be given to adding personnel to the Department to split the responsibilities among at least two employees.

Diana outlined the steps required to obtain a permit for a new Septic System. The steps are basically:

- Site Inspection
- Soil Tests
- Review of the Design of the System
- Contractor Plan Review.

The Health Department has a list of approved Contractors who install Septic Systems. The Department will not recommend one Contractor over another, but Diana will tell you which of the Contractors work she has observed.

There is a lot of concern about older Septic Systems in the County particularly around Raccoon Lake. Some of these old systems are nothing more than dry wells that can become fouled and overflow dumping effluent into creeks, and even the lake itself. There is no requirement that the Septic System be inspected as part of the sale of an older house. But it is recommended that buyers arrange for an inspection prior to closing on an older property. Diana indicated that she is willing to work with potential buyers of older properties upon request. There are requirements that all new construction obtain permits for the Septic System which include inspection of the design and operation of the system.

In cases where the Septic Systems are failing there are new technologies that Homeowner's Associations might evaluate. These technologies are targeted to cluster type systems which can handle multiple homes. There are grants available to purchase these systems if required. The Health Department is willing to help Homeowner's Associations apply for these grants. Diana said that if a homeowner has a failing Septic System they should contact the Health Department to review possible actions that could save the system before it totally fails. If a Septic System fails, and cannot be replaced due to space limitations, the alternative is a "pump & haul" system. This is simply a Septic Tank that must be pumped whenever it becomes full. This is only a temporary solution, and will ultimately require an acceptable alternate type of sewage system be installed, or the property will not be considered habitable.

A question was asked concerning observations of what could be considered illegal health actions. This would include the smell of sewage, the observation of liquid rising to the surface near a Septic Field. This also includes suspicious food

handling observations, open barrels and drums on properties, large piles of tires, and hauling of these items without the proper license. . Diana said that these conditions should be reported to the Health Department. She said that a person with the complaint or observation should file a written statement with a description of what has been observed, and how it might affect the observer. The Health Department will then investigate.

Contact Information is as follows;

Parke County Health Department

Phone – 765-569-6665

Diana's Cell – 765-592-0199

E-Mail parkecohealth@yahoo.com

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 am.

For those of you who were not present you really missed a very informative Meeting.

The next Parke County Non-Partisan Committee on Political Education meeting will be held on November 22nd @ 9:00am in the Extension Conference Room located at the Fairgrounds in Rockville. The topic will be Raccoon Lake, and State Park – interface with the County and its Residence.

There will be no meeting in October due to the Covered Bridge Festival.

John Anderson

Chairman – Parke County COPE