

Parke County Non-Partisan  
Committee on Political Education  
February 16, 2009

Subject: Meeting Minutes – January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009

The January 24th Meeting was held in the Extension Service Conference Room at the 4H Fairgrounds in Rockville. The featured topic of this meeting was the Parke County & Indiana State Health Departments. The featured speakers for this meeting were Diana Peterson, Parke County Health Department Inspector, and Debbie Barnhizer, Indiana State Department of Health onsite sewage and septic Inspector. I would like to offer a special thanks to Diana and Debbie for their presentations, and the open discussions of the challenges facing the County and State Health Departments.

Diana started the meeting by stating that The County Health Department is charged with the responsibility for Public Health of the Citizens of Parke County. She went on to describe some of the activities of the Department that are available to the public to assure that this responsibility is met.

- The County Department offers well water testing for bacteria and metals. A citizen can pick up a test kit at the Health Office in the Courthouse. A sample of well water is then sent to lab as directed via priority mail. The cost of the test is \$8.00. Diana pointed out that the sample must be into the lab within 24hours to obtain an accurate result. Therefore the sample should not be taken or shipped on Thursday or Friday.
- The Health Department can also do testing for lead, and asbestos in a home or building. They have a free kit to test for Radon also.
- The Health Department can investigate open dumping of trash and tires. They will help with the cleanup of salvaged cars on properties.
- Septic system inspection and ordinance inspection are a big part of the Health Department's charge. Current Septic System Ordinances are old and are being updated. A draft of the new proposed rules is being forwarded to the County Commissioners for review.
- If you monitor toxins on your own using, the Health Department will assist in reviewing the results and planning actions to correct.
- The Health Department is also charged with restaurant inspections. In the near future the Department will begin to publish the results of these inspections in the local newspaper. These publications will list the code and the violation found. They will also list the corrective actions taken, and the results of a re-inspection. If a violation is detected three times corrective action must be taken or legal enforcement will be taken. This could result in the closing of a restaurant or food handling facility. Diana asked that if citizens see issues in restaurants that they visit to please let her know.

- A discussion was held concerning “fugitive dust”. This is dust that comes from gravel roads that leaves one property and floats over to another. This of course can result in aggravation of asthma, and other reparatory problems. Diana asked that if you have a problem with this situation please let the Department know the location and vehicle count. There are actions that can be taken to control this dust, but the magnitude of the problem must be known in order to justify the actions.
- Mold in homes - If you have or believe you have a problem with mold in your home, your personal physician can write a prescription for testing by the Health Department. This only applies to unseen mold. If there is mold visible in a facility there will be no need for a test. There currently are no County or State specifications for what level of mold will result in contamination.
- Camp Grounds are a big concern with the Health Department due to failing septic systems. Diana asked that if a citizen sees a potential sewage violation in a camp ground that they notify the County Health Department.

Finally Diana explained the Organization of the Parke County Health Department. She 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.

Contact Information is as follows;

Parke County Health Department  
Phone – 765-569-6665  
Diana’s Cell – 765-592-0199  
E-Mail [parkecohealth@yahoo.com](mailto:parkecohealth@yahoo.com)

Debbie Barnhizer next took over the meeting and made a presentation on decentralized sewage disposal systems. Debbie’s home station is Oaktown, Indiana, just north of Vincennes. She has been involved in the inspection and enforcement of sewage ordinances for the State for a number of years. She summarized her current efforts as follows:

“We are interested in creating Sewer Districts that can support development of alternate sewage disposal systems. With the formation of a Sewer District Homeowners can obtain low interest loans to build local sewage systems.”

Debbie reported the Jim Meece is working on an application to create a Regional Sewer District in Parke County. Subsequent to this meeting I received the following note from Jim Meece speaking to the status of this effort:

I met with Debbie, Diana, and Jill Curry following our meeting Saturday to begin the process of creating a Regional Sewer District. I have two items of info to get from another lady at the state which I will do today. The first step is the submission of a petition to the state and a subsequent public hearing. We would probably schedule that hearing either immediately before or after a regular commissioner's meeting.

The question is in the formation. We need to decide whether to create as one county wide entity with different projects around the county or to create multiple districts within the county. The lake area for one could be a district as you realize the need and are interested in moving on this. Other low income areas could be formed as needed in order to benefit from the low income status. Such areas do not have to be contiguous, so we could lump disparate areas together as needed. The results could be the same either way; we just need to affirm which method makes the most sense to get the biggest bang for our buck. Several of us need to get together to consider the options and outcomes. I want to do this right the first time.

Note; Jill Curry is a professional Grant Writer who is helping Jim in this process.

The main direction of Debbie's work involves the utilization of "decentralized sewage disposal systems. What is a decentralized system?

- It is not a "big pipe" municipal sewer system.
- It is not a "big sewage disposal plant"
- It is and must be considered "infrastructure".
- It utilizes new and current technology to dispose of sewage waste
- The main point is that the system is "off of the big pipe"

Debbie then presented a "Power Point" presentation of 7 systems that she has been involved with in Indiana that are up and running. The fundamental similarity of these systems is:

- They are all based upon cluster of homes concept. Some a few as three and some as many as 100+.
- They deliver effluent from the individual septic tanks to the sewage disposal via a simple "septic tank effluent pump" either as part of the single septic tank or as an additional tank. This permits building of the system with little or no consideration of elevations of the individual septic tanks.
- The sewage disposal/effluent absorption portion of the system is the normal type of septic field similar to those used in single dwelling systems. There are systems utilizing a "wet land dome" absorption system.

The main reason for a decentralized system is that it is cheaper than a "big pipe/plant" system, and it is more flexible. In addition over time it has been shown that these systems perform well.

*From my point of view the only problem with establishing one of these systems, particularly around Raccoon Lake is the land required for the absorption field. If you consider any sub-division there is not a lot of vacant land to build a large absorption field in.*

*This may be offset by modern Technologies that utilize smaller amounts of land in association with pre-treatment of the affluent with chemical or natural filter mediums. (Just a thought)*

Next we discussed the problems faced by the County with sewage disposal. Debbie reported that 26% to 40% of all residents in Indiana utilize septic systems. Around Raccoon Lake there are concerns with systems that were built in the 60's when the lake was first filled. Some of these systems are still in use with new houses that were built after the original home was torn down to permit construction of a larger home. In the future those of us who live around the Lake may have to consider the alternate sewage systems described by Debbie at this meeting. These are issues that we all must consider in the future as these aging systems begin to fail.

If you have questions on the subject of the alternate systems please contact Debbie Barnhizer at 317-508-2607. E-mail [dbarnhizer@isdh.in.gov](mailto:dbarnhizer@isdh.in.gov)

The meeting was adjourned at 11:15am.

The next Parke County Non-Partisan Committee on Political Education Program Meeting has not been scheduled. We are working on several possible programs including Solid Waste handling in the County, the future of Education within the State and County, and the status of the Parke County Comprehensive Development Plan. You will be notified when these topics are scheduled.

John Anderson  
Chairman – Parke County Non-Partisan Committee on Political Education  
Association