



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



CASE STUDY

Sewage and Wastewater Elimination Education Program (SWEEP)

About 23,000 households in Licking County, Ohio, are located outside of areas served by central sewers and must treat and dispose of wastewater on their own lots. In order to proactively address new septic system regulations forthcoming in Ohio, the Licking County Health Department (LCHD) sought to increase homeowners' awareness on proper care and maintenance of these septic systems. Made possible by a grant from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2011, through the Ohio Environmental Education Fund, the health department launched the Sewage and Wastewater Elimination Education Program (SWEEP).

SWEEP, which ran from May 2012 to August 2012, featured homeowner-assisted information gathering and a series of LCHD-led educational workshops.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

The program began with a direct mailing designed to both inform homeowners of the program and guide them through gathering basic information about their septic systems. Nearly 10,000 direct mailings were sent to homeowners in the health department's septic system database during the



LCHD conducted water quality workshops that educated Licking County homeowners on the importance of septic system maintenance, arsenic testing, home radon testing, and using rain barrels to reduce stormwater runoff.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The program was initiated in order to better develop LCHD's septic system operation and maintenance program. The goals and objectives of the SWEEP program were two-fold:

- Update the health department's septic system database regarding the number, variety, and maintenance of homeowner septic systems.
- Educate homeowners on the importance of regular septic system maintenance.

A secondary goal of the program was to test the arsenic levels of residential well water throughout the county, accomplished through a partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey.

program's launch in May 2012.

The direct mailing contained:

- A cover letter describing the SWEEP program.
- A fact sheet on different types of septic systems installed in Licking County.
- A pre-paid, pre-addressed postcard containing a brief questionnaire about what type of septic system each homeowner had and when it was last pumped.
- A flyer promoting the homeowner education workshops.

In addition to SWEEP flyers posted throughout the county, a press release was sent to local media, resulting in both radio newscasts and newspaper articles about the program.

After the direct mailing, the LCHD held three homeowner training and education workshops on septic system performance and maintenance at school buildings in three different areas of the county.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Being mindful of the hesitation homeowners may have about exposing their septic systems to scrutiny, LCHD stated in their direct mailing that upgrades and updates to septic systems would not be forced. LCHD found that this approach increased homeowners' receptiveness to participate in the program.

To incentivize attendance at the workshops, the first 60 attendees at each event received a free arsenic test for their well water.

PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to a partnership with the Ohio EPA, the LCHD developed a number of strategic partnerships that helped enhance the success of the SWEEP program, including:

- **The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS):** In order to conduct a study of the arsenic content of residential well water in Licking County, USGS offered the first 60 attendees at each workshop a free well water arsenic test.
- **The Licking County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD):** SWCD—a locally organized, self-governing body chartered by the state—set up educational displays on the detrimental environmental consequences of poorly maintained septic systems at workshop locations.
- **Jack's Septic:** LCHD partnered with Jack's Septic, a septic system installer in Licking County, to provide the homeowner education workshops. The partnership was



LCHD set up demonstration tables at their SWEEP workshops complete with handouts and models.

formed to provide

homeowners with the perspective of a private business related to septic system maintenance. The partnership also allowed homeowners to receive a consistent message related to septic system maintenance rather than hearing "this is what the health department is making us do."

- **County School Districts:** The health department partnered with Licking County School Districts to host workshops at schools located in three areas of the county. Students from a local vocational school assisted with the logistics of stuffing the 10,000 direct mailing envelopes.

RESULTS

Results of SWEEP surpassed LCHD's expectations. Twenty-seven percent of postcards were returned, twice as many as expected, and 25 or more people attended each of the three educational workshops. The data collected during the project from homeowners regarding their septic system maintenance activities was input into LCHD's database and will be used to determine the percentage of systems being serviced on a regular basis.

After the program's direct mailing, the department called the top five septic pumpers in the county, and each reported increased calls, proving a significant jump in septic system maintenance awareness.

Overall, the department learned that homeowners are indeed interested in maintaining their septic systems, but need guidance on its importance and the steps to take for proper upkeep. Based on SWEEP's success, the health department plans to replicate the workshops on a semi-annual or quarterly basis.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SWEEP PROGRAM

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Licking County



Health Department