



# MOU Partnership Progress Report

## Partners Leveraging Knowledge and Resources to Educate and Promote the Expanded Use of Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems as Solutions in Today's Wastewater Infrastructure

### November 2014

In November 2011, EPA renewed a partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding with 16 public and private sector organizations to improve decentralized wastewater management in the U.S. In November 2014, the partnership continues to grow with the addition of the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO), National Rural Water Association (NRWA), and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). Since its creation in 2005, the partnership has generated many successes, marked by better cooperation, collaboration, consultation, and communication among the various organizations. Some of the highlights of the efforts put forth by the MOU participants since 2011 are listed below.

### Highlights

• **MOU Partnership Papers.** In 2012, the EPA Decentralized MOU Partnership developed four short papers for state, local, and tribal government officials as well as interested stakeholders, which include information on the uses and benefits of decentralized wastewater treatment and examples of where they have played an effective role in a community's wastewater treatment infrastructure. These papers include an introductory paper as well as three papers detailing the economic, environmental, and public health aspects related to decentralized wastewater treatment.



- **Increased Training and Workshops.** Attendance at training and workshops for installers and pumpers has increased markedly over the past three years, and feedback has been extremely positive. The partners have continued to collaborate on training efforts—relying on the combined strengths of each organization.
  - Between 2012-2014, NAWT conducted 291 Vacuum Truck trainings. Additionally during 2012-2014, NAWT conducted 74 installer trainings, 1,349 inspector trainings, and 232 maintenance trainings for industry professionals.
  - NEHA participated in two MOU Partners webinars to promote the understanding and advancement of onsite wastewater systems. NEHA has partnered with NOWRA to offer training and Certified Installer of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (CIOWTS) credential exams to onsite professionals in the state of New Jersey. The organizations, in addition to NESCA, are looking into partnering in the future to offer this combination to other onsite wastewater professionals across the country.

- In 2014, RCAP served approximately 2000 small communities focusing on improving drinking water and wastewater. RCAP provided training and technical assistance to small, low-income and tribal communities to which nearly 300 projects were wastewater focused. Approximately 50 tribes received technical assistance and training to expand the Native American Water Masters Association (NAWMA). RCAP is coordinating a nation-wide effort with partners such as the American Water Works Association and Florida Gateway College to provide training all over the country.
- NEHA and SORA co-located their conferences for the past 8 years and brought together local and state regulators to discuss onsite wastewater issues, go on field trips and learn what is new in the onsite wastewater arena. The 2014 conference was the 16<sup>th</sup> annual SORA/Captains of Industry (COI) conference in Las Vegas and it attracted regulators from 27 States and 16 private industry companies.
- NESC partnered with the USDA and through its FY 2013-14 TAT grant provided decentralized wastewater information and technical assistance to individuals, associations and government in rural disadvantaged communities. NESC also partnered with the Central Asia Regional Environmental Center to provide face to face water management training information to over 100 watershed representatives in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.
- In July 2014, NOWRA and NESC met with members of Congress to further educate them about decentralized and onsite wastewater issues.
- WEF-NOWRA workshop – NOWRA and WEF’s Small Communities Committee collaborated on a day-long workshop at WEFTEC 2013 titled “Does Size Matter? The Case for Scalable Decentralized Wastewater Treatment.” The goal of the workshop was to help utility managers better understand the economics of decentralized wastewater treatment and to demonstrate how it can be done profitably within existing utility service areas as an alternative to expansion of centralized collection systems.
- **Installer Curriculum.** NOWRA introduced its Installer Academy Course Curriculum, a wide range of courses offered to industry professionals – installers, service providers, designers and engineers. Since its introduction, NOWRA has trained more than 650 industry professionals.
- NEHA and NOWRA collaborated on three CLOWTS certification sessions held in New Jersey during the first six months of 2014. NOWRA conducted the training for each session. Following the training, participants had the opportunity to take NEHA’s CLOWTS advanced installer exam. More than 200 installers in New Jersey took the training course, with nearly all taking the exam as well.
- NOWRA has developed a Standard of Practice for advanced onsite system design, and is circulating it within the industry for further refinement. In addition, the association has developed an Advanced Design Training curriculum. The Advanced Design Training curriculum was taught for the first time in July 2014 in Maryland, and later in 2014 at the NOWRA Annual Conference.
- **Model Performance Code.** NOWRA continues to encourage state and local regulators to adopt the EPA-supported initiative to develop a model performance code for managing onsite and cluster wastewater treatment systems.
- **MOU “Partnership Alley”.** WEF organized the eighth annual MOU “Partnership Alley” at WEFTEC14, one of the Wastewater industry’s premier national conferences. Partner participation in the WEF Small Communities Committee has expanded and strengthened WEF’s support for decentralized systems as part of the nation’s wastewater treatment infrastructure.
- **MOU Exhibit Booth.** The partners continue to exhibit the MOU booth and have developed a variety of outreach materials for display at conferences and training workshops. This effort has helped tremendously in promoting the MOU partnership and its efforts.
- **SepticSmart.** On November 15, 2012, EPA launched its long await homeowner education and awareness program for the proper care and maintenance of their septic systems. Protecting human health and the environment is the responsibility of the homeowner and EPA and their partners are able to provide educational information to them so that they can achieve that goal. Maintaining a system is safer and more economical than having to replace a failed system due to neglect.

- SepticSmart Week.** With the help of the MOU Partners, EPA launched its first annual SepticSmart Week on September 23-27, 2013 in an effort to draw national attention and participation from homeowners, community organizations, the industry, and decision makers about the importance of septic systems and their proper care and maintenance. For the second annual SepticSmart Week, September 22-26, 2014, EPA and the MOU Partners grew their efforts and focused the messaging on protection and restoration of water quality; it gained attention from three Governors (OR, VT, MN) declaring it SepticSmart Week in their state. New materials were added to the Toolkit and local events and articles were widely held and distributed across the country.
- Webcast Series.** The MOU Partners established a webinars series that has developed since 2010 and continues to be a success. Quarterly the partnership hosts a webinar on a topic of interest related to the decentralized wastewater industry and has had over 100 participants on each webinar. During 2013-2014, MOU webinars focused on climate change impacts, real estate property transfers and the role of certification in technology approvals.
- Technology.** NSF continues to develop new and update current American National Standards for decentralized treatment systems and components through its national,



voluntary, accredited consensus process. Standards for nutrient reduction and field performance verification of treatment systems have been instrumental in the data sharing and approval efforts among the Chesapeake Bay watershed states. New and expanding standards for reuse treatment systems are helping decentralized technologies gain broader acceptance as an innovative solution to water shortages and green alternatives. Additional standards are in development, including those for treatment additives and high strength wastewater treatment systems, expanding the recognition and acceptance of decentralized treatment products.

## The Future Shines Bright

The ongoing success of the MOU Partnership and extensive outreach regarding its benefits to the decentralized wastewater industry has created synergy among the partners and sparked interest among other organizations.

Maintaining the momentum for the next three years will require a sustained effort by the partners to support the:

MOU Partnership—especially in integrating the regulatory, policy, and research issues of the new partners into future.

MOU activities—while continuing to build upon the group’s shared goals and common interests. As the Partnership moves through the remainder of 2014 and beyond, there will be an increased emphasis on improving consistency regarding management practices and linking management to treatment technologies, data sharing for advanced treatment systems, and nutrient management regarding the condition of receiving waters. Training events, conferences, webcasts, and workshops will continue to play a major role in maintaining the viability of the partnership and enhancing the competency of the public agency.

