



Handout for MOU Renewal: Accomplishments 2017

*Prepared by the Partners for the
Decentralized MOU Renewal Meeting*

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In 2005, the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** issued a Program Strategy for the Decentralized Wastewater Program to improve the performance of decentralized wastewater treatment systems. One of the components of the Program Strategy is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between EPA and organizations involved in managing decentralized wastewater systems. The MOU is intended to upgrade the professionalism within the industry and to facilitate collaboration between EPA Headquarters, EPA Regions, state and local governments, and national organizations representing wastewater management practitioners. These collective efforts are intended to support and improve system performance.

The original MOU was signed on January 12, 2005, with eight partner organizations. It has since been renewed three times: November 2008 with six additional organizations; November 2011 with two additional organizations; and 2014 with three new organizations. For the 2017 renewal, there are 18 organizations in the Partnership, including the newest member, the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS). The 2017 MOU renewal is focused on continuing to expand the ongoing collaborative relationships in the decentralized wastewater industry. It also aims to encourage proper decentralized system management and protect the nation's public health and water resources with an emphasis on small, rural communities.

This document highlights key accomplishments and benefits in the last renewal period between 2014 - 2017. The information has been provided by members of the MOU Partnership. The document focuses on work with state and local government entities, trainings, partner collaboration, increasing organizational capacity, and the Partnership's annual homeowner awareness campaign "SepticSmart Week," among other topics.



Louisiana Rural Water instructor conducting a homeownwer workshop.

MOU PARTNERS WORK WITH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

OVERVIEW: The 18 members (the MOU Partners) of the EPA Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership (the Partnership) serve as a liaison and interface with state, local, and county government entities. Specifically, the following MOU Partners have engaged with state and local government entities in the following ways:

In 2016, the **National Environmental Services Center (NESC)** conducted a **state and local level assessment** to compile 2015 onsite systems permit data at the state and local level. To date, NESC has collected data for more than 50% of the counties throughout the U.S. NESC also worked with the State Onsite Regulators Association (SORA) on the state regulator national assessment and obtained information from 48 states on current use of nitrogen reducing technologies.

SORA worked with states and EPA to populate the new EPA Water Finance Clearinghouse through an email template developed by SORA. SORA communicated the need for state regulator assistance in providing financial resource information for the Clearinghouse. Information was first sent out to SORA's State Regulators

Board, then SORA contacted other state entities for information.

Another partner, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (**ASTHO**), **discussed decentralized systems and promoted Partnership materials with its State Environmental Health Directors.**

These directors are an organized peer group within ASTHO whose membership includes environmental health leaders from U.S. state and territorial health agencies.

The National Association of Wastewater Technicians (NAWT) worked with state entities in the field to provide training. As a result of NAWT's work, several states, particularly in the Southwest, including Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, now require inspector training for real estate transactions. NAWT has "raised the bar for training in some states because

of the training offered by NAWT. In California, the California Onsite Water Association has established its own trainers and they use NAWT training materials," according to Bruce Fox, NAWT, Board of Directors

National Rural Water Association (NRWA) is moving forward in a proactive way by closely working with the State of Louisiana to create homeownwer workshops for residents on bayous. NRWA has passed out over 900 door hangers in Louisiana. In Mississippi, NRWA is working with a contractor to develop a homeownwer course.

Following a 2015 Memorandum of Cooperation among Chesapeake Bay Region states (Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia) **SORA and National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association**

(NOWRA) continue to remain actively engaged in data sharing efforts between states on nitrogen reduction technologies.

They are supporting other regional and national efforts to encourage wider sharing of data to help speed the introduction of new technologies into the field.

MOU Partners have made the following statements about the Partnership and its ability to work with state and local government entities:

- “The Partnership allows SORA to funnel information down to local agencies. For example, SepticSmart Week has helped bring awareness to the local level on this issue. It has brought awareness to county

sanitarians, especially in the state of Kansas. The state of Kansas created and printed public relations packages of SepticSmart materials.”

– *Chuck Cousino, SORA, President*

- “The Partnership has had a huge impact on NOWRA’s relationship with state agencies”

– *Eric Casey, NOWRA, Executive Director*

MOU PARTNERS BUILD CAPACITY WITHIN THEIR ORGANIZATION

OVERVIEW: EPA and the majority of the 18 MOU Partners have continued to re-sign onto the Partnership since 2005 due to the Partnership’s ability to focus on key industry issues and increase industry knowledge within their own organizations. Senior leaders of the Partnership remain supportive and designate representatives for Partnership workgroup calls, webinar presentations, and special projects. Specifically, a few MOU partners have described how the Partnership has increased capacity within their organization:

- “As one of the founding members of the Partnership, NAWT continues to leverage resources of the Partnership to increase training among field technicians. From the beginning, we have valued this Partnership as a part of the decentralized community because we felt that was important. All of NAWT’s leadership over the years have felt this is important to our organization.”

– *Bruce Fox, NAWT, Board of Directors*

- ASTHO has a Safe Water Workgroup that is the “home” for many of the discussions related to decentralized wastewater systems. Through this group, ASTHO has bridged information and discussed details of the MOU and the resources that have come out of the Partnership.

– *Kerry Wyss, ASTHO, Director, Environmental Health*

- The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), a founding member of the Partnership, continues to re-sign onto the MOU because of the added value of sharing the Partnership’s resources.

NEHA regularly circulates and promotes the Partnership’s webinar series to its membership. The recorded webinars are “extremely useful and have helped keep everyone in the loop.”

– *Christl Tate, NEHA, Programs & Partnership Development*

- The Water Environment & Reuse Foundation (WE&RF) has increased its research efforts on decentralized systems. “It was really helpful coming to this phase of decentralized research in our organization and learning who is working in this space. It is also helpful to learn about the many perspectives of research and the future direction of the industry.”

– *Katy Lackey, WE&RF, Research Manager*

- The Association of Clean Water Administrators (ACWA) has noted the Partnership’s resources are “helpful to ACWA’s membership, which focuses on many issues under the Clean Water Act. This Partnership provides a concentrated source of information that is reputable.”

– *Julia Anastasio, ACWA, Executive Director*



At a WE&RF workshop, Brian Pecon and Sarah Triolo from Trussell Technologies present on a risk-based approach for water quality guidelines for onsite systems: pathogen credits and log reduction targets.

- “Because of this partnership, CDC has enhanced the Safe Water for Community Health (Safe WATCH) Cooperative Agreement by encouraging grantees to include onsite wastewater systems as a potential source of water resources contamination, including groundwater.”

– *Max Zarate-Bermudez, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Epidemiologist*

MOU PARTNERS COLLABORATE ON MULTIPLE EFFORTS

OVERVIEW: The MOU has served to strengthen relationships among partners since 2005. The Partnership has led to new collaborative efforts such as co-sponsoring industry conferences and other outreach efforts that promote sustainable wastewater practices. Many MOU partners have commended EPA for its leadership and its ability to bring organizations together for a unifying purpose. One MOU Partner has said:

The Partnership “is a great opportunity for all partners with a vested interest to promote small communities. It is a terrific group that is engaged and is the glue to push the decentralized industry into the future.” – Lisa McFadden, Water Environment Federation (WEF), Director, Integrated Technical Programs

One notable achievement of the Partnership has been the creation of the **Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference**. Now in its third year, the Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference is a collaboration between several national and state onsite wastewater organizations, including three MOU Partners: NAWT, NOWRA, and SORA. Furthermore, MOU Partners typically offer registration discounts to their conferences for other partners, and offer to be speakers at partners’ conferences.

Several MOU Partners have collaborated on **an effort to obtain better industry data on the number of septic systems in the country**. NOWRA is leading an effort to add a question to the U.S. Census and seven other MOU Partners have signed on to a letter urging EPA to continue the effort. The Partnership has continued to focus on this issue and has identified necessary steps to obtain better data.

Several MOU Partners supported WE&RF and a collaborative working group for a **peer review on the Urban Fabrick-led report “Design Professional’s Guide to Non-Potable Onsite Water Reuse.”** This brought important perspective and technical review to an effort that will help bridge new sectors working on small systems design and develop onsite water reuse at the building scale. The report was reviewed

by eight MOU Partners and will be published in late 2017.

MOU Partners participated in a 2016 webinar on ground-breaking research led by WE&RF with the **“Risk-Based Framework for the Development of Public Health Guidance for Decentralized Non-Potable Water Systems” project**. To date, WE&RF has received positive feedback from local health departments in four states that have used this guidance to develop state ordinances for non-portable onsite systems. The webinar and MOU Partner participation provided key information to MOU Partners and their constituents. It served to broaden the conversation through a Q&A session and keeping various organizations up-to-date on the latest science in developing water quality guidelines and small-scale systems that protect public health.

The WEF Small Communities Committee is another example of how MOU Partners collaborate on industry needs. The committee meets twice a year and provides a forum for the transfer of technology and training between local decision-makers and operators of small community facilities. The **“MOU Partnership is always discussed at our meetings,”** according to Lisa McFadden, WEF, Director, Integrated Technical Programs. The Committee supports WEF membership, which includes thousands of members, to

better assist small communities with sustainable solutions.



Top: National Backhoe Roe-D-Hoe® Championship at the 2017 Onsite Mega Conference. Bottom: EPA Decentralized Team at the 2017 Onsite Mega Conference.



Left: Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection representative at a SepticSmart Week information booth. Right: A SepticSmart Week Bus advertisement in Washington State



MOU PARTNERS PROMOTE AND SUPPORT SEPTICSMART WEEK

OVERVIEW: SepticSmart Week is an annual homeowner awareness campaign which began through the MOU Partnership in 2012. Every year, this campaign brings increased awareness, outreach efforts, and engagement from new and existing stakeholders. SepticSmart Week outreach has resulted in extensive social media posts, increased service calls to providers, governor and county proclamations, local events, and other outcomes.

MOU Partners have commented on how SepticSmart Week has benefited their own organization:

- “In the past two years, during SepticSmart Week, there was a 40% increase in web traffic on our septic-related information. SepticSmart Week has evolved and grown, and for NOWRA, it has helped us focus on year-round discussions on responsible septic system maintenance. It has also provided an opportunity for our state affiliate organizations to get engaged in a coordinated messaging effort. To

date more than a dozen of our State Affiliates have held SepticSmart Week activities or events.”

– *Eric Casey, NOWRA, Executive Director*

- “Before the Partnership, NRWA’s social media was not widespread. One or two years ago, we had a few followers on Twitter. Now since we have joined the national SepticSmart Week campaign, NRWA has a social media presence in every state. And before the Partnership, NRWA would have never considered pursuing governor proclamations.”

– *Michael Preston, NRWA*

- “We have been able to pass down SepticSmart Week technical assistance materials to state partners. States typically don’t have time to develop education materials, so for a lot of us this is a great opportunity.”

– *Ann D’Alfano, SORA, Board of Directors*

- “CDC has acknowledged the importance of and promoted the Partnership’s SepticSmart on our website and via social media.”

– *Max Zarate-Bermudez, CDC, Epidemiologist*

COMBINED HIGHLIGHTS OF SEPTICSMART WEEK 2014 - 2017:

- Developed SepticSmart Week into a national awareness campaign reaching all 50 states, inspiring similar campaigns internationally (Australia!)
- Reached more than 3 million newspaper readers
- Generated more than 600 social media posts in two years reaching nearly half a million users
- In 2016, increased webpage views and document downloads by 400% on the EPA SepticSmart Webpage, and EPA saw 15,033 total page views during SepticSmart Week
- Completed 19 (unique) state and city government proclamations to increase homeowner awareness
- Influenced homeowners to schedule service of their septic system; providers noted an increase in calls during SepticSmart Week
- Reached homeowners via television, radio and bus advertisements, billboards, printed materials, and newsletters

THE NEXT RENEWAL PERIOD: 2017 - 2020

The Partnership will remain a driving force that adapts to the changing needs of the decentralized industry. Other federal agencies and organizations, including USDA, Indian Health Service, and the National Association of Realtors, will continue to participate in industry discussions and support efforts of the MOU Partnership.

Because the MOU Partnership is an essential mechanism to promote sustainable wastewater treatment, EPA and the 18 MOU Partners plan to remain committed to the Partnership for years to come. In the next renewal period, 2017 – 2020, MOU Partners will focus on:

- Increasing onsite technician training in states for real estate transactions
- Working with states on streamlined information
- Ensuring decentralized systems are maintained and functioning properly in order to protect water quality and public health
- Obtaining accurate, updated statistics on decentralized wastewater treatment system usage in the US
- Expanding opportunities to emphasize the utility of decentralized wastewater treatment systems
- Leveraging existing funding mechanisms for decentralized wastewater treatment systems
- Emphasizing decentralized wastewater treatment education
- Promoting job growth and professionalism in the decentralized wastewater industry



PARTNERSHIP WEBINAR SERIES

The MOU Partnership held seven webinars in the past renewal period. MOU Partners promoted the webinar series and provided suggested topics and speakers for the series. Due to the promotion of the series by the MOU Partners, the average webinar registration reached approximately 200 registrants per webinar.

Webinar topics included: homeowner finance options for system maintenance and installation, wastewater discharge in rural communities, incorporating decentralized systems within large utility systems, and how to obtain SepticSmart Week governor proclamations. The webinars included presenters from a variety of fields including academia, federal agencies, state departments, and public health officials.

Partnership webinars are archived on EPA's webpage and continue to serve as excellent resources for all MOU Partners and their organization's membership.

