

2018 Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference

EPA Listening Sessions on Growing the Decentralized Wastewater Workforce

Wednesday, October 24, 2018, 8:30 am – 12:00 pm

Doubletree Bloomington – Minneapolis South, Minneapolis, MN

Today the decentralized wastewater industry faces multiple challenges. A primary one is the lack of workforce recruitment to bring new staff into the field. There is growing concern that as much of the workforce nears retirement age, trained individuals will not be available to replace them. Another major issue relates to effective decentralized wastewater education. At the trade school level, while many states have certification programs and training focused on the decentralized industry for contractor and service providers, a significant number of states have no training or certification programs at all. At the university level, there is a known shortage of education and training options for engineers, soil scientists and wastewater treatment plant operators looking to gain necessary knowledge related to decentralized systems. The need to address both these issues has led to the proposed “Listening Sessions” at the 2018 Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference.

Facilitated Listening Sessions at the Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference

The first listening session will be focused on professionals with higher education (e.g., professors, research staff, PhDs, etc.) working in environmental, public health or engineering programs. The second session will focus on staff with trade skills such as those trained at technical/community colleges, or as pumpers and maintenance providers. These two sessions will begin to help identify gaps and determine an array of implementable solutions and best practices. The goal of the “Listening Sessions” is to determine what is needed for the industry, such as training courses, curriculum development, and/or certification programs, to name a few. Each listening session will be 90-minutes in length. The first session, focused on technical school level education will take place from 8:30 am – 10:00 am. The second session focused on higher-education disciplines will take place from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm.

The proposed discussion questions are as follows:

- Why isn't your workforce growing? (retirement, lack of recruits?)
- What do you see as barriers to growing the decentralized industry?
- What are the limitations to your own career development?
- What education do you need that you don't have access to?
- What would attract the workforce to decentralized systems?

EPA will form a “Workforce Steering Group” of 8-10 industry, state or technical experts to guide and inform the development of the Listening Sessions and revise the above questions as

needed. EPA's intent is to gain input from the decentralized community of professionals, industry and service providers on what they view are the limitations to growing the decentralized wastewater work force. We are holding these listening sessions as an opening to begin this conversation and gain input from the community. EPA intends to hold a 'decentralized workforce convening' meeting later in 2019 to review the findings from this input as well as market research and industry input. Ultimately, EPA would like to work with leaders in the decentralized community to identify the barriers to growing the industry workforce and create strategies to overcome them.