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May 2009 e-News

NOWRA e-News - May 2009

Thank you to all who contributed stories and ideas. This member communication belongs to each of us, so keep the news and ideas coming.

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A Quick Look at the Economy

As we reported last month, indications continue to emerge that the economy may be seeing early signs of stabilization. Here is a review of some economic indicators:

Jobs / Employment Trends - Last week's number of job losses totaling 539,000 was less than the predicted 620,000. This sent stocks higher to complete the eighth winning week in the past nine. This comes on the heels of a government report that new applications for unemployment benefits fell last week to the lowest level in 14 weeks.

The trend line indicates that the outlook for employment is much less negative than in prior months, but it is not likely that employment growth will resume before 2009 Q-4. Some White House estimates now say it will not occur until early in 2010, backtracking on prior estimates. The April index recorded its smallest decline since June 2008, and three of its eight components used even showed improvement.

Stock Prices - Major indexes have risen for five straight weeks, a rally unmatched since prices hit an all-time high in Fall, 2007. While volatility has eased, there is still concern in sectors such as banking and the auto industry.

Consumer Confidence - Consumers' short-term outlook improved significantly in April. Those anticipating business conditions will worsen over the next six months declined to 25.3% from 37.8%, while those expecting conditions to improve increased to 15.6% from 9.6% in March. The employment outlook was also considerably less pessimistic. The percentage of consumers anticipating fewer jobs in the months ahead decreased to 33.6% from 41.6%.

Septic Locator

NOWRA's Septic Locator will connect you with a wastewater professional in your area and our membership list.

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while those expecting more jobs increased to 13.9% from 7.3%. The proportion of consumers anticipating an increase in their incomes edged up to 8.0% from 7.8%.

Credit - Money is flowing more freely in the form of business loans and mortgage financing, thanks to Federal Reserve efforts to keep interest rates low and the money supply abundant. Many believe that the jury is still out on when basic stability will return to the sector though.

Retail Sales - As we were going to press with this edition, the Commerce Department's monthly retail sales report hit. It shows that sales at U.S. retailers actually fell for a second straight month in April, pulled down by sluggish gasoline and electronic goods purchases.

The Commerce Department said total retail sales slipped 0.4% after falling by a revised 1.3% in March, previously reported as a 1.2% drop.

Excluding motor vehicles and parts, sales dipped 0.5% in April, compared to a 1.2% decline the prior month.

Vehicles and parts sales rose 0.2% after a 2.0% plunge in March.

This report flew in the face of earlier reports from more than a dozen U.S. retailers who raised earnings guidance last week. They reported that shoppers were back in stores last month, with reports suggesting clothing and discretionary spending led the buying activity.

Retail Metrics reports that its index of same-store sales last month rose 1.5%.

So much for being able to depend on one report over another...

Real Estate - The two main bellwethers for housing's future - the supply/demand equation and affordability - are both pointing toward a recovery. While timing is impossible to predict, experts suggest that home sales will stage a resurgence beginning late this year or in early 2010. On the heels of that news, all the major homebuilder stocks have rallied off the multi-year lows they hit in March. For example, Toll Brothers is up 50%, and D.R. Horton 100%.

In related news, the National Association of Realtors said the volume of signed contracts to buy previously occupied homes rose for the second month in a row.

Homebuyers taking advantage of bargain prices, low interest rates and a tax credit for first-time buyers pushed the seasonally adjusted index of pending sales up by 3.2% to 84.6 in March.

These results not only beat analysts' flat expectations, but were also 1.1% above last year's levels, the first time that has happened since December.

Manufacturing - After 6 consecutive months of readings below the 40% level, the manufacturing sector continues to moderate. The New Order Index as measured by The Institute for Supply Management™ Manufacturing Business Survey Committee is now at 47.2% vs. 41.2% in March. While this is good news, there is still a large gap to close before manufacturing begins to grow once again.

Customers' Inventories - Inventories are settling into 'acceptable' levels after reporting inventories as 'too high' for eight consecutive months.

Oil - The price of light, sweet crude recently jumped above \$60 a barrel, marking a new high since November of 2008, before retreating slightly. The recent rally is due in part to thoughts that demand for oil is picking up and positive economic news that has been coming through over the past several weeks.

The upward pressure on prices does not change the fact that U.S. crude stockpiles are still growing, and stand at their highest level since 1990. Demand continues to decline due to the sluggish economy.

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NOWRA Announces Management Change

At the recent business meeting held in conjunction with the 18th Annual Technical Education Conference & Expo in Milwaukee WI, it was announced that the Washington Onsite Sewage Association (WOSSA) will provide interim administrative support for NOWRA.

The change will be effective starting June 1, with May as the transition month. The Board of Directors approved the motion as they continue to look for ways to weather these troubling economic times. The decision to reduce the role and contract for the responsibilities requested was not a viable option for BTF Enterprises, NOWRA's current management firm. WOSSA offered the Board an interim and stable solution through one of our most reputable state affiliate organizations at an affordable cost. The Board thanked BTF for their active support and professionalism over the time we worked with them, and is especially thankful for their role as we went through cutbacks over the last year.

The NOWRA President, Tom Groves, made it clear that while our industry and our organization are not immune from the challenges our economy is facing, we have made and will continue to make difficult choices as we steer through this economic period. We continue to invest in the long-term future of NOWRA and the industry as a whole. He reiterated that prudent investment is essential if we are to sustain our dynamic role in the economy and fulfill the commitments we have made to each of our members and partners.

New contact information:

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Water Softener Guidance Document Released

Allison Blodig, Chair of NOWRA's Technical Practices Committee, released the Guidance Document dealing with Water Softeners in an onsite system. Both water softening/conditioning and onsite wastewater treatment systems are commonly used together, and in the majority of these cases, no problems were indicated. However, there have been sporadic, mostly anecdotal reports of issues related to the use of both kinds of equipment at some sites. Experts in both fields worked together on this task force for a better understanding of the interactions involved between water softeners and onsite wastewater systems.

The Water Quality Association (WQA) and NOWRA collaborated to offer advice based on available knowledge that is now available in this guidance document. The document will be posted on the NOWRA website in the News Release section of the Consumer Information tab at http://www.nowra.org/news_releases.html.

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Annual Business Meeting Information Posted

In accordance with its bylaws, NOWRA held its 2009 Annual Business Meeting at the Annual Conference in Milwaukee (4/2/2009), and the information is posted on the NOWRA website at http://www.nowra.org/news_releases.html. This report contains a complete accounting of the past year's activities and current/future plans.

We encourage all members to review the information presented.

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Committee Volunteers Needed

There has never been a better time to participate in NOWRA and make a difference than right now! Our committees offer the opportunity to create rich streams of information that enhance communications and support the onsite industry in the marketplace. Committees are the backbone of the organization and can only move forward with your contribution.

NOWRA Committees

- **Marketing/Communications**

- The “face” of NOWRA
- Renewed emphasis on communication (e-News, breaking news blasts, support to other committees)

- **Resource Library**

- Postings of papers, manuals, etc.
- Newsletter articles
- Links to other resources

- **Education Committee**

- Technical education programs (Annual Conference, Installer Academy, Pumper Show, CIDWT Installers training, etc.)

- **Technical Practices**

- Development, review, monitoring of technical practices (Nitrogen Forum, Water Softener Guidance, etc.)
- White Papers (Decentralized Wastewater Management)

- **Government Relations**

- Monitor federal and state policy changes (federal stimulus package)
- Respond to state affiliate regulatory issues (Georgia Water Plan, Colorado code revision, Pharmaceutical Forum, etc.)

- **Affiliate Leaders**

- Increase Affiliate involvement and direct communication with NOWRA

If you would like to learn more about our committees, along with a link to contact the committee chair, please visit us at <http://www.nowra.org/committees.html>.

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About NOWRA

The National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA) is the largest organization within the U.S. dedicated solely to educating and representing members within the onsite and decentralized industry. NOWRA has Affiliates, with constituent local groups throughout the U.S. and Canada.

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