

EPA Decentralized Wastewater Program: Overview and Updates

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Presentation Outline

- EPA Decentralized Program Background
- Decentralized MOU Partnership
- SepticSmart Week

Disclaimer: The comments made in this presentation are those of the presenter and not of NOWRA or the Mega-Conference sponsors.

Decentralized Program Background

- 1997 Report to Congress on Decentralized Systems in the U.S.
 - Primary Finding: Decentralized systems can provide the same level of treatment, and may be less expensive than centralized wastewater (sewer) treatment
- Early 2000s: Decentralized Program created including issuance of many guidance documents, and MOU Partnership
- EPA program provides non-regulatory program support focused on outreach tools for homeowners, counties and states

Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership

- MOU renewed every 3 years
 - Next Renewal: December 2026
- Established in 2005 with 8 partners
- Now includes 24 partners



Decentralized Wastewater MOU Priorities

1. Increase public education and outreach through EPA's SepticSmart program
2. Promote Technical Assistance (TA) resources
3. Showcase information and technologies
4. Utilize federal and MOU partners' networks to collect, analyze, and apply data.
5. Expand mechanisms to address workforce, training and research

2025 MOU Workplan Activities

•EPA expanded the number of communities receiving technical assistance - currently supporting 82 total communities

The U.S. Census Bureau released the final language for the new 'septic system' question to be included in the American Community Survey (ACS)

EPA and IHS updated the Homeowner's Guide to Septic Systems for Tribal Communities

EPA developed a resource guide on the impacts of extreme weather events on decentralized systems.

US Census Septic System Question

- **2018** – Efforts began to add a septic question to the ACS, including interviews, question testing, and building organizational support
- **1990** – Last time the ACS collected septic data
- **January 2025** – Data collection for the new septic question began
- **September 2026** – Data available for communities with **65,000+ residents**
- **2029** – Data available for communities with **fewer than 65,000 residents**

Is this house, apartment, or mobile home connected to a public sewer?

- Yes, connected to public sewer
- No, connected to septic tank
- No, use other type of system

Septic Question in the new ACS

Decentralized Wastewater MOU Priorities

EPA has identified the following priorities for 2026:

- **Priority 1-2:** Identify opportunities to promote the SepticSmart program
- **Priority 2-2:** Connect communities to funding sources through technical assistance
- **Priority 4-2:** Update EPA website with specific system information from U.S. Census
- **Priority 4-3:** Utilize related data to extrapolate to septic system use and needs
- **Priority 5-1:** Build capacity to expand outreach, share training resources and lead the expansion of the decentralized workforce



SepticSmart Week

2025 Highlights

September 15-19, 2025

<https://www.epa.gov/septic/septicmart-week>



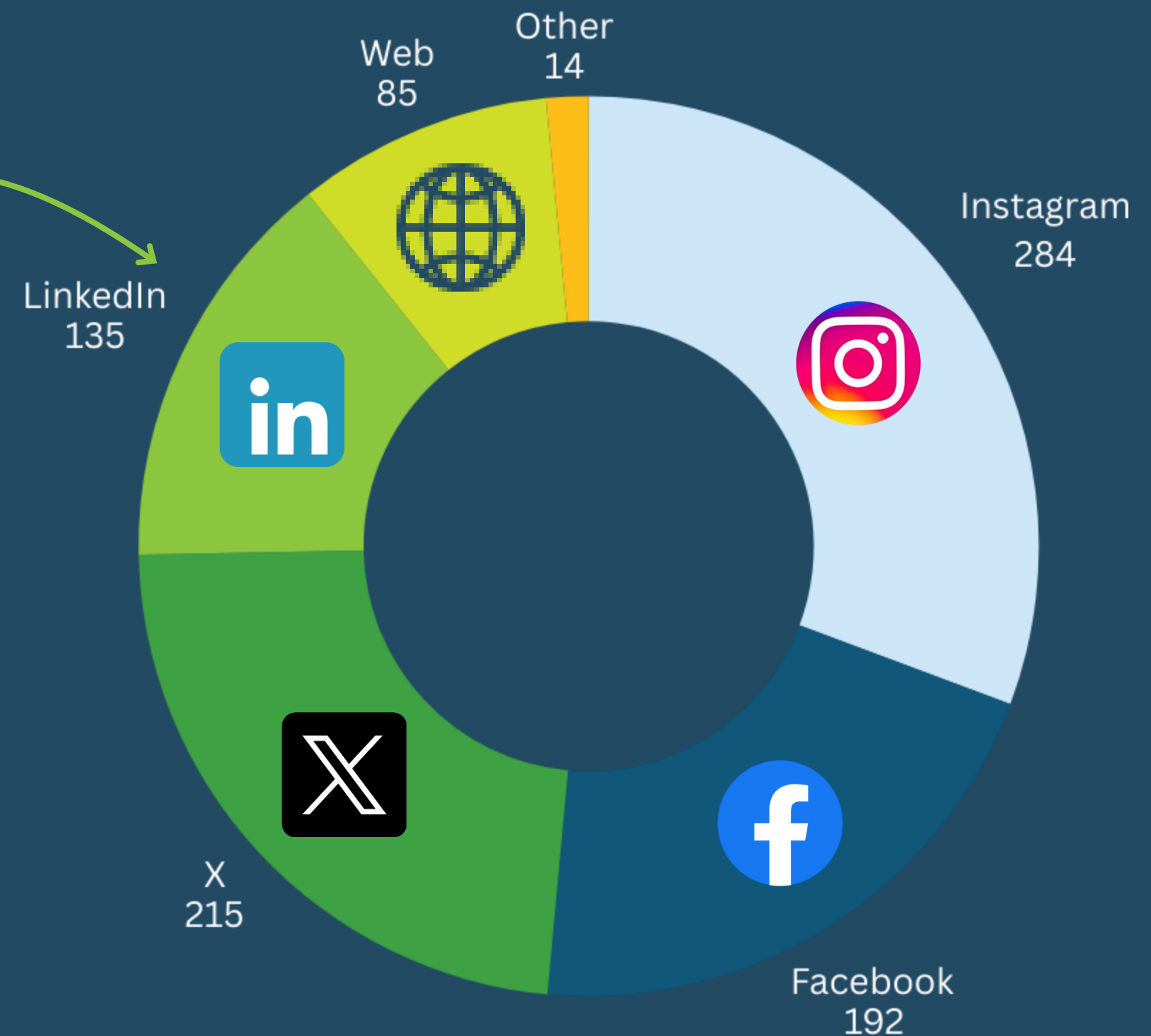
SepticSmart Success Metrics

SepticSmart Socials

925 mentions
across social platforms

15,243 interactions
likes, comments, reshares, etc.

4.8 million reached
social media accounts reached



EPA Website Traffic

Total Page Views	2025	2024	2023
Avg Weekly Views: Jan-August	10,262	22,463	16,680
SepticSmart Week Views	10,368	32,065	17,752

14 Proclamations

+2 from 2024!

9
states



Idaho



Michigan



Minnesota



New Mexico



North Carolina



Oregon



South Carolina



Virginia



Washington

3
municipalities/
counties



Henry & Stark County
Health Department



Hampton
NEW HAMPSHIRE

2
professional
organizations

NOWRA

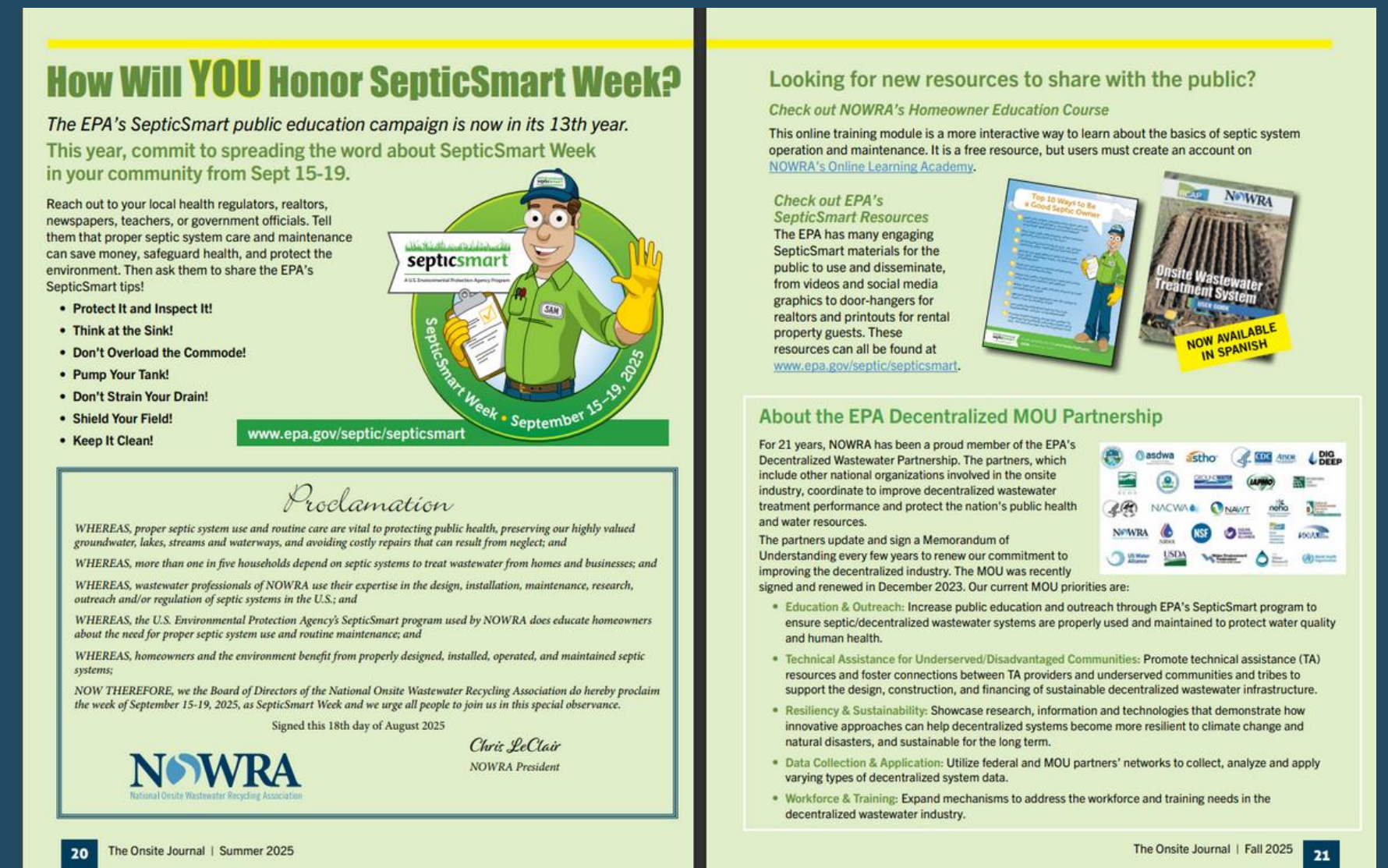
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SepticSmart Outreach Efforts

MOU Partner Efforts

- In collaboration with the **SepticSmart Week Steering Group, Illinois Water Survey** shared cautionary tales about septic maintenance through a blog post.
- **International Code Council** published a blog post promoting SepticSmart Week and standards for proper septic maintenance.
- **GWPC** highlighted SepticSmart Week in the Source Water Collaborative newsletter and website.
- **USDA-RD** posted to X and received 5,300 impressions, 39 likes, and 43 reposts.



NOWRA included a two-page spread about SepticSmart Week in the fall issue of Onsite Journal.

Community Events

- **Indian Health Services** in Tuscon, Arizona hosted homeowner education events for the Tohono O’odham Nation.
- **Michigan** Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy Department hosted a “Septic Systems & the Environment” webinar on Monday, 9/16.
- University of **Minnesota**’s Water Resource Center held a “Being Septic Smart” webinar on Tuesday, 9/16.
- **Pennsylvania** State University Extension hosted a “Septic System Basics” webinar on Tuesday, 9/16.



SEPTIC SMART WEEK

WHEN
September 16 & 18, 2025

WHERE
TON Recreation Centers

**HOMEOWNER EDUCATION EVENT:
LEARN ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF
CARING FOR AND MAINTAINING YOUR
SEPTIC SYSTEM**

- Question & answer session • Kids activity sheets •
- Quick tip videos • Informational handouts & flyers •

WWW.EPA.GOV/SEPTIC
INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE— TUCSON AREA OFFICE
SANITATION FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION BRANCH
TUCAOWaterAndSewer@IHS.GOV OR 520-295-5626

SELLS REC CENTER
Tuesday, 9/16
10am-noon

HICKIWAN REC CENTER
Thursday, 9/18
10am-noon

AL JEK REC CENTER
Thursday, 9/18
2-4pm

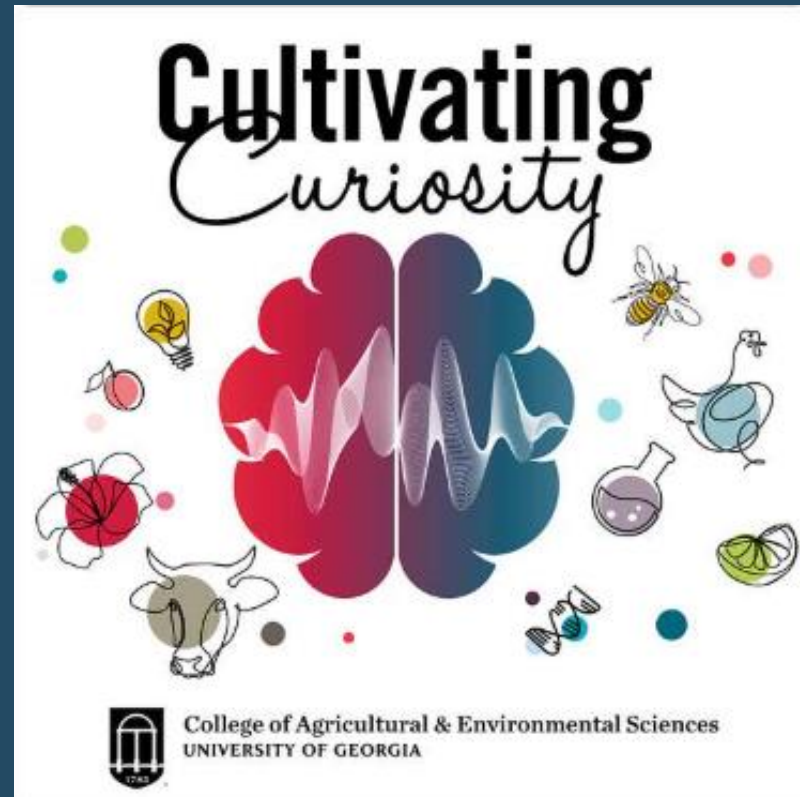
INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE
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septicSMART
SepticSmart Week • September 15-19, 2025

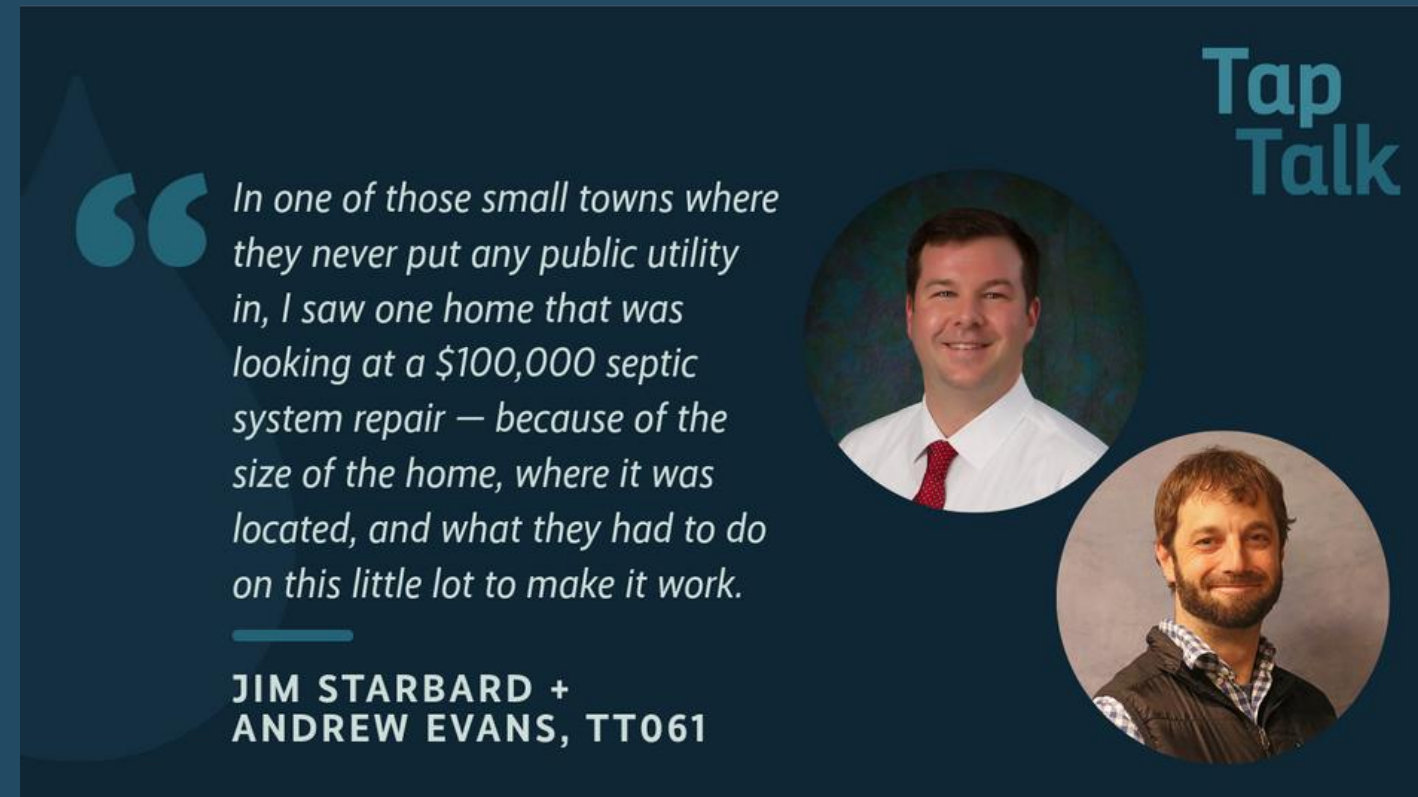




SepticSmart Podcasts



University of Georgia's *Cultivating Curiosity* explored the science of septic systems.



Rural Community Assistance Partnership's *Tap Talk* discussed septic system challenges and maintenance tips. This podcast was produced with support from the SepticSmart Week steering group.



Orengo Water's *Make It Clear* highlighted resources for septic system owners.



SepticSmart Socials

Spotlighted Posts & Stories

Instagram

spotlighted posts



Miller's Septic Service in Gloucester, VA, used creative graphics to highlight SepticSmart tips.

Pee.
Poop.
Paper.

That's it.



University of Georgia promoted Gary Hawkins - a water resource expert featured on the SepticSmart episode of the podcast *Cultivating Curoosity*.



Arizona Department of Environmental Quality reminded audiences that **only the 3P's** go down the toilet!

Brevard County, FL

Featured County

Lagoon Loyal, a county program, encourages behaviors that benefit the Indian River Lagoon and local waterways.

A locally tailored Instagram campaign educated residents on septic system care and its impact on waterways through:

- regional facts
- available resources
- myth-busting posts
- engaging quizzes

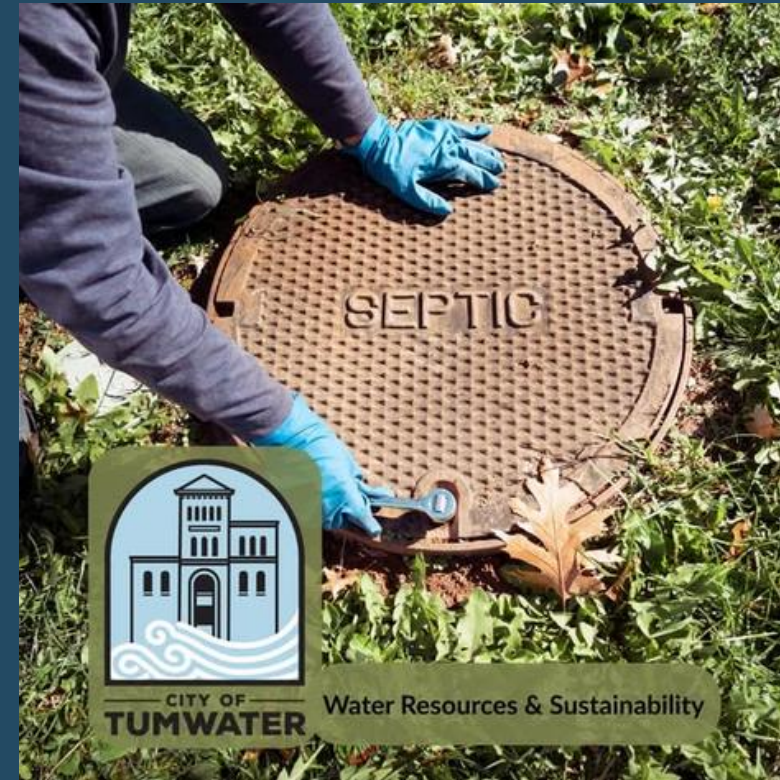


Facebook

spotlighted posts



Shelby County Health Department, TN, promoted SepticSmart Tips in English and Spanish.



The City of Tumwater used clever captions to effectively deliver SepticSmart Tips.



Baldwin County Health, AL, developed creative graphics for resident awareness.



X (Twitter)

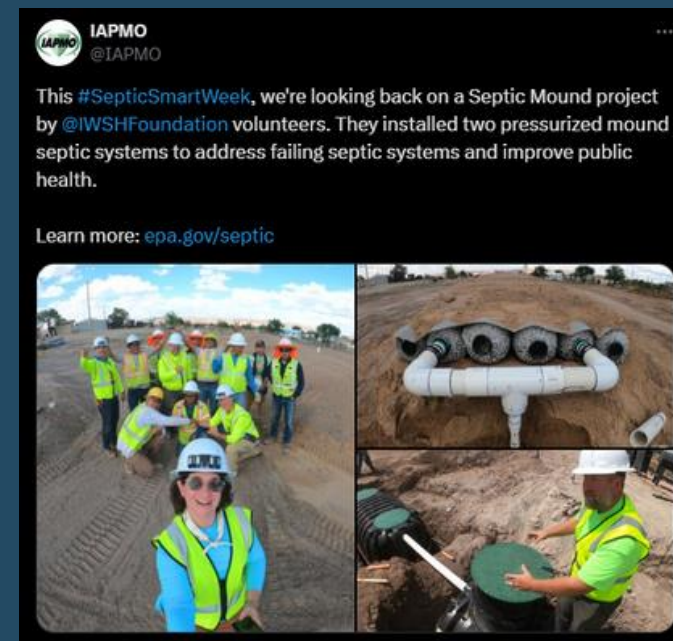
spotlighted posts



Janet Kelly, Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources, celebrated SepticSmart Week.



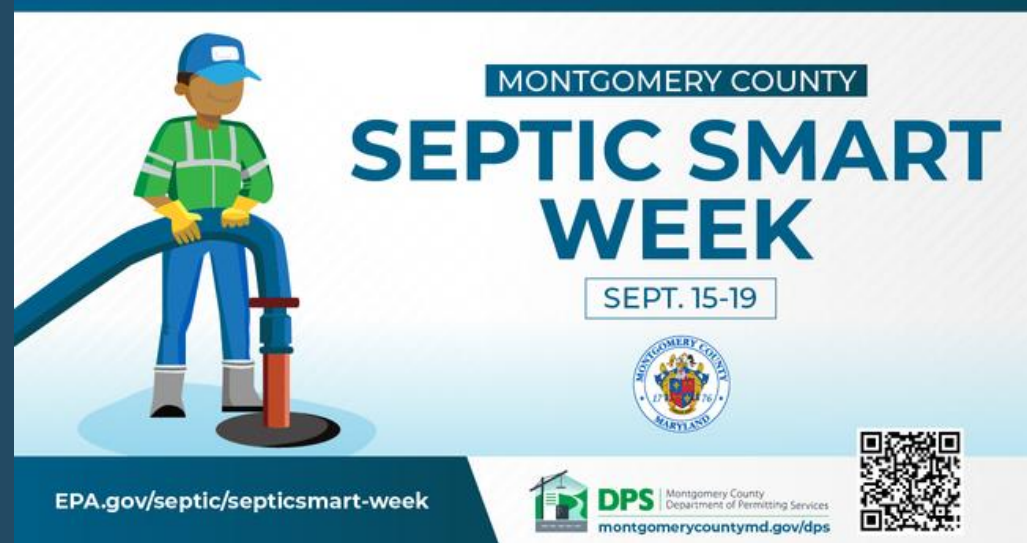
Howard County Health Department, MD, reminded residents to protect their drain fields.



MOU partner IAPMO celebrated past successful septic system replacements.

News

spotlighted stories



Montgomery County, MD, developed innovative SepticSmart Week graphics for a press release.

CULPEPER STAR*EXPONENT

LOCAL NEWS

CSWCD shines light on cost-sharing for Septic Smart Week

A local paper in Culpeper, Virginia, highlighted how county efforts can save homeowners money.



CRAWFORD COUNTY

AVALANCHE

GRAYLING, MICHIGAN

SepticSmart Week highlights importance of care, maintenance of septic systems

Guest Opinion
September 17, 2025

Michigan's District Health Department #10 collaborated with Michigan Public Health Alliance to highlight SepticSmart week in the local paper.

YouTube, Reels, TikToks

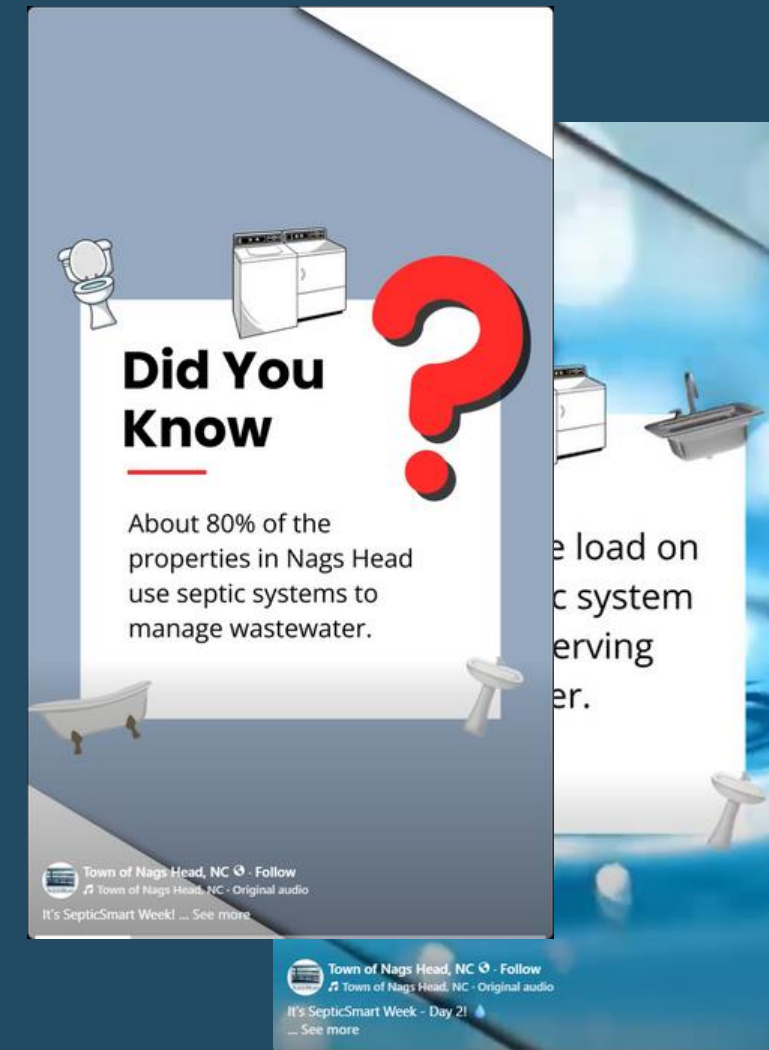
spotlighted videos



Kim the “Pumper Princess,” owner of Turner Septic in Conway, NH, celebrated with a SepticSmart Tips series on TikTok.



HomeField East Valley in AZ celebrated SepticSmart Week on YouTube.



The Town of Nags Head, NC, posted a series of Facebook Reels with SepticSmart tips.

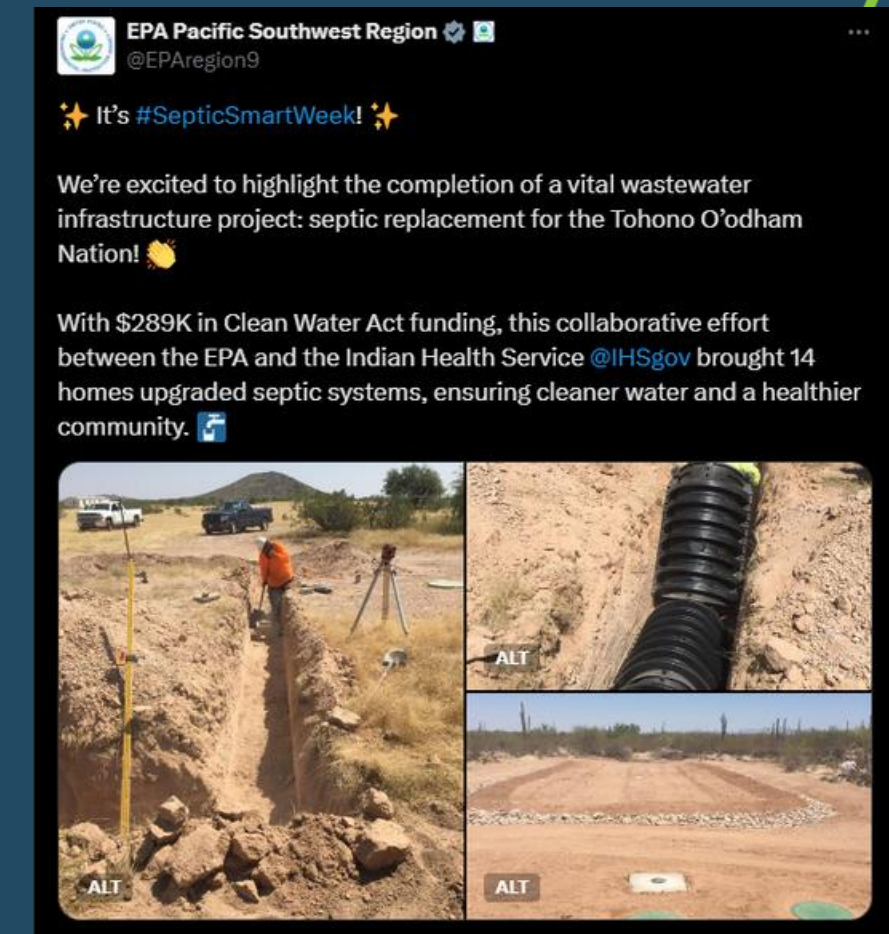
EPA Socials



EPA Region 7 promoted SepticSmart Week with unique graphics on Facebook.



EPA Region 8 posted a series of infographics with SepticSmart tips to Instagram.



On X, EPA Region 9 celebrated new septic replacement projects for the Tohono O'odham Nation.



Decentralized Opportunities

- What are the best opportunities to educate homeowners on septic systems?
- How can decentralized technology address rising groundwater and/or sea levels?
- Are there ways to make innovative/alternative decentralized systems more affordable?
- What barriers prevent greater use of decentralized technology?