

THE Onsite Journal

NOWRA
National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association

Fall 2026

2026 CONFERENCE PREVIEW EDITION

October 25-28
Westminster, Colorado



Also Inside:

A Cautionary Tale about
Cesspools in Hawaii and
Long Island, p. 27





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A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

USDA Grant and a Big Thank You!

NOWRA was awarded the USDA Rural Water and Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training Grant based on its unique expertise and national reach in serving rural communities reliant on decentralized wastewater systems. The proposal demonstrated urgent need, with nearly 30 formal letters of support from communities facing sanitation failures, and highlighted NOWRA's proven track record in managing federal grants and delivering technical assistance.

The USDA recognized NOWRA's "Hub-and-Spoke" model, which leverages a network of 20 Technical Assistance Professionals and affiliated state organizations to provide both deep, project-based support and rapid response troubleshooting. The grant aligns with USDA's mission to improve rural quality of life, targeting communities under 2,500 population and below 80% of state median household income, where centralized sewer solutions are financially unfeasible.

As I deliver my final President's message, I would like to formally

acknowledge and thank the board members and committee chairs for their significant contributions and dedication of time.

The National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA) thrives because of the collective dedication of its Board of Directors, Committee Chairs, Vice Chairs, and all volunteers. Each individual contributes time, expertise, and leadership to support the onsite and decentralized wastewater profession, helping strengthen the association and the industry it serves.

Across the organization, levels of involvement naturally vary. Some board members and committee leaders are deeply engaged in ongoing projects and strategic work, while others support when their schedules allow or step in during key moments. This range of participation is normal in a volunteer driven organization—and every contribution, regardless of scale, is sincerely valued.

To all NOWRA board members: **THANK YOU** for providing direction, insight, and national representation for our profession. Your willingness



to serve helps guide NOWRA's mission and support communities across the country.

To every Committee Chair and Vice Chair: **THANK YOU** for leading discussions, coordinating initiatives, and ensuring each committee's efforts align with broader organizational goals. Your leadership—whether continuous or focused around peak activity periods—keeps essential work moving forward.

With all these dedicated voices helping shape the present, it is especially encouraging to see the energy and engagement coming from the Emerging Professionals Committee. Their enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment give me genuine hope that our industry has a strong, vibrant future ahead.

NOWRA is stronger because of each of you, and your contributions are deeply appreciated.

— **Chris LeClair**



Kate Carney, Tom Groves, Chris LeClair, Jim King, and Dwayne Jones at the NOWRA Executive Committee Retreat.



Interested in getting more involved with NOWRA?

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Contact the NOWRA office at info@nowra.org

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Welcome to the fall issue of NOWRA's Onsite Journal. This annual conference preview issue includes helpful information about our upcoming conference, along with updates on NOWRA's recent activities and accomplishments.

The biggest news for our organization is the receipt of a large USDA grant to provide training and technical assistance to small communities across the country. NOWRA is excited about this opportunity and is already preparing so we can begin work when the grant takes effect on October 1. Over the past several years, NOWRA has worked diligently to become more involved with federal grants that provide the industry with the tools, training, and support it needs. This grant is especially important because it will allow NOWRA to support our state affiliate organizations as they deliver direct technical assistance to communities in their state.

By the time this issue arrives in your mailbox, September will be here and fall will be right around the corner. There is no better way to kick off the season than with national recognition of SepticSmart Week, which will take place September 14–18 this year. NOWRA, along with several state affiliate organizations, will conduct activities to educate homeowners about septic systems and raise awareness of our industry. For more information on the SepticSmart program, refer to the article on page 24.

We are also focused on the 2026 Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference, which will be held in Westminster, Colorado, at the end of October. The planning team has developed a strong program, including national perspectives from Japan and Australia. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Yurie Shirakawa, will open the conference with her perspective on international onsite

wastewater issues. We look forward to welcoming her to Colorado, showcasing U.S. onsite wastewater technologies, and gathering with colleagues from across the industry. For more information on the conference including an outline of all activities and events, please see page 16.

In closing, I would like to thank the volunteers and staff who help make this organization so strong. We could not do this work without the dedication of so many qualified volunteers, and it is encouraging to see young professionals becoming more involved in the industry and especially our organization. Thank you for being part of NOWRA, and I look forward to seeing you in Colorado in October.

— **Thomas Groves**



More info and
enrollment



New Health Benefits Available for NOWRA Members

At NOWRA, we're committed to supporting the health and well-being of our members. That's why we're excited to announce a new partnership with Apollo Health Insurance.

As a NOWRA member, you now have access to a range of tailored health insurance plans designed to meet your unique needs. Whether you're an installer, designer, pumper, service provider, or other small business owner in the onsite wastewater industry, Apollo offers flexible and affordable options with your lifestyle in mind.

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To explore your options and enroll, please visit [Apollo and NOWRA Enrollment](#) to schedule your call. For immediate assistance or to learn more, please contact Apollo at 816-282-1977.

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STATE AFFILIATE NEWS

SCOWA (SOUTH CAROLINA) — The South Carolina Onsite Wastewater Association (SCOWA) is looking forward to another **One-Day Field Day Event** on **November 12, 2026**, in Clinton, South Carolina. The event will provide a hands-on educational experience designed to strengthen field skills and offer practical training for onsite wastewater professionals in South Carolina.

The event will feature rotating training stations covering both foundational and advanced topics, including permit interpretation, drainfield layout, pump diagnostics, soil interpretation, repair scenarios, and field decision-making. Participants will learn through demonstrations and interactive exercises in a simulated field environment.

SCOWA is excited to continue expanding educational opportunities that promote professionalism, collaboration, and excellence within South Carolina's onsite wastewater industry. We look forward to welcoming attendees this November.

WOWRA (WISCONSIN) — The Wisconsin Onsite Water Recycling Association has been working with regulators on the requirements related to the design/construction

of large-scale POWTS systems. It has also been working with state regulators on improved practices related to the application for, and approval of, continuing education programs for the industry. The Association continues to sell out its POWTS Evaluator program each year (November), offering additional coursework beyond the minimum requirements to become state licensed.

YOWA (NEW ENGLAND) — The Yankee Onsite Wastewater Association (YOWA) recently awarded their inaugural Academic Research Presentation Scholarship to Nelson da Luz for his poster "Mapping Onsite Systems Across the United States: Lessons Learned and Advancements in Machine Learning Based Methods". This scholarship provides funding to help cover registration, travel, and lodging to present at the Mega-Conference hosted by the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA). Additionally, the recipient will share their research at a New England conference.

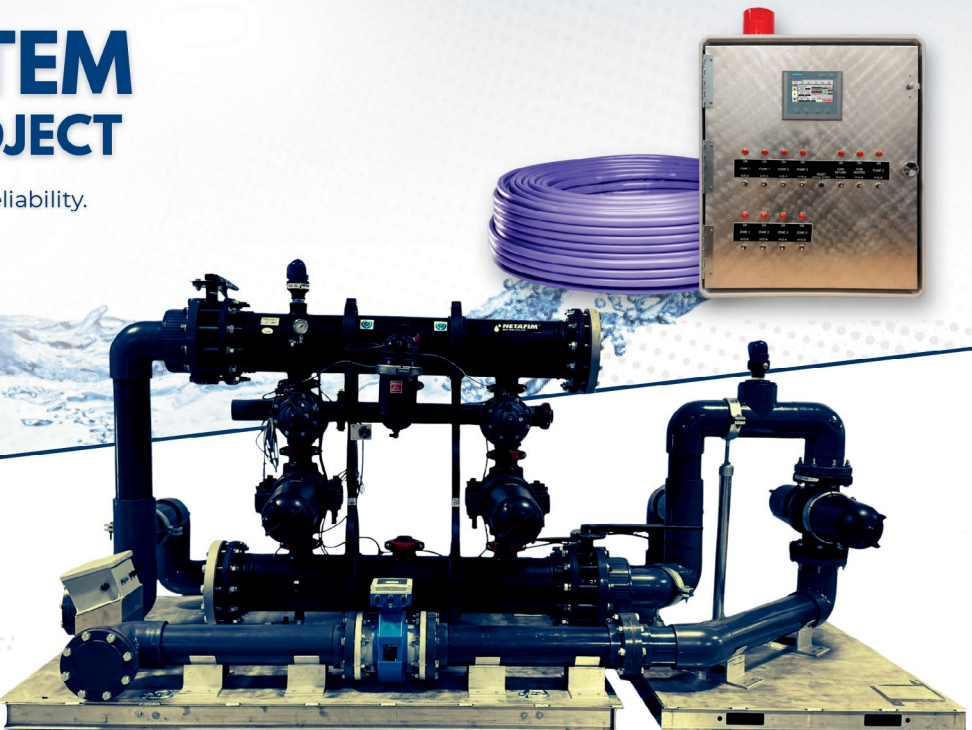
This program reflects YOWA's commitment to encouraging research, supporting the next generation of professionals, and strengthening connections between academia and the onsite wastewater industry.

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NOWRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

This year's slate of candidates for
NOWRA's Board of Directors is:

Academic Category

Robert Bair (CO)
Amal Bakchan (TX)

Designer/Engineer Category

Jonathan Maass (TX)
Dawn Rohrs (OK)

Regulator Category

Michael Broussard (NM) — incumbent
Robin Mack (SC)

Supplier Manufacturer Category

Ashley Donnelly (CT) — incumbent
Cynthia Morton-Rolleston (ME)
Mike Vernon (TX)

Additional information on each
candidate is available on the
Board of Directors page on
NOWRA's website

[www.nowra.org/about/
governance/board-of-directors/](http://www.nowra.org/about/governance/board-of-directors/).

Voting closes October 31, 2026.

In order to be eligible to vote,
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NOWRA allows voting by email, fax, or US Mail.



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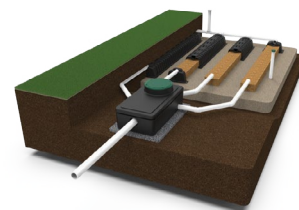
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NOWRA COMMITTEES

NOWRA's committees are the working groups of the organization. They exist to shape the direction of the organization over time. NOWRA welcomes and encourages its members to become involved with its committees and task forces. To belong to a NOWRA committee, you must be a NOWRA member. For information on joining a committee check out the [committee webpage](#) or contact the NOWRA office at info@nowra.org.

Corporate Member Committee

Open to existing NOWRA Corporate Members only

Chair: Ashley Donnelly, Infiltrator

Conference Planning Committee (2026 Mega-Conference)

*Chair: Kate Carney, Colorado Professionals
in Onsite Wastewater*

Education Committee

Chair: Gary Hawkins, Ph.D., University of Georgia

Emerging Professionals Committee

Chair: Jonathan Kaiser, Infiltrator Water Technologies

Government Relations Committee

Open to existing NOWRA Lobbying BOG only

Chair: Carl Thompson, Infiltrator Water Technologies

Marketing & Communications Committee

Chair: Donna Fiorentino, Infiltrator Water Technologies

Online Education Committee

Chair: Sara Heger, Ph.D.

Onsite Journal Committee

Chair: Robert Bair, Ph.D., University of South Florida

State Affiliates Committee

Open to existing NOWRA state affiliates

*Chair: Jessica Wood, Residential Sewage
Treatment Co.*

Technical Practices Committee

Chair: Chris Strycharz, Infiltrator Water Technologies



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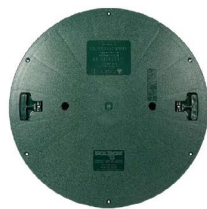
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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

New Legislation Promises to Transform the Federal Decentralized Wastewater Landscape

By Tim Perrin and Marisa Campbell, TSG Advocates

Two years ago, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) included decentralized wastewater in its 2024 Clean Watersheds Needs Survey for the first time. This acknowledgment was the result of NOWRA's years-long advocacy campaign to ensure that federal policymakers understood the prevalence of decentralized wastewater systems and recognized the essential role they play in protecting public health and the environment.

NOWRA is building on this achievement by making the bipartisan *Clean Water Allotment Modernization Act of 2026* (S. 5016) its top legislative priority. Introduced this summer by U.S. Senators Rick Scott (R-FL) and Mark Kelly (D-AZ), the legislation would modernize the outdated formula used to distribute Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) dollars by linking funding to each state's documented wastewater infrastructure needs. As a result, states with greater decentralized wastewater needs would receive a larger share of federal funding for eligible projects.

The CWSRF is a critical federal financing tool for wastewater and water quality projects, including decentralized wastewater treatment. EPA recognizes onsite and clustered systems—including

septic systems, cluster systems, and lagoons—as eligible uses of CWSRF support, along with repair, replacement, new installation, responsible management entities, septage treatment works, and equipment that helps maintain decentralized systems.

For decentralized wastewater stakeholders, the CWAMA matters because the current funding formula no longer reflects today's infrastructure needs. Rural, suburban, coastal, and rapidly growing communities increasingly rely on onsite systems, yet homeowners and small communities often face costly repairs or replacement costs without the rate base of a large utility. A modernized, needs-based formula would help states invest in failing systems, groundwater protection, nutrient reduction, septic-to-sewer or cluster alternatives where appropriate, and other projects that protect public health and local waterways.

Under S. 5016, CWSRF allotments would be based primarily on documented wastewater infrastructure needs, while also considering state population and poverty data. This approach would better direct federal resources to communities with the greatest infrastructure needs while reinforcing NOWRA's

message that decentralized systems are sustainable and essential components of the nation's wastewater infrastructure.

The legislation would phase in the new formula over four years, allowing states to adjust while maintaining existing set-asides for Indian tribes and U.S. territories. By requiring regular updates using the latest infrastructure, census, population, and poverty data, the bill would make CWSRF funding more responsive to the challenges NOWRA members address every day.

NOWRA members can play an important role in helping advance this legislation. Here are five ways to get involved:

1. Send personalized emails to your Senators.

Explain how clean water infrastructure funding affects onsite wastewater professionals, homeowners, rural communities, and small businesses in your state. Personal stories and state-specific examples are especially effective because the legislation is based on documented infrastructure needs rather than an outdated funding formula. Contact information is available at www.senate.gov or on your Senators' official websites.

continued on next page

2. Ask your Senators to cosponsor S. 5016.

Senators Scott and Kelly are actively building bipartisan support for the bill. A constituent's request to cosponsor legislation carries significant weight, particularly when accompanied by local examples.

3. Meet with Senate staff.

Request a meeting with the staff member who handles environment, infrastructure, or rural development issues in your Senator's state or Washington office. Explain how CWSRF funding decisions affect decentralized wastewater systems, water reuse, and your community.

4. Invite your Senators or their staff to see the industry firsthand.

A visit to an installation, service company, manufacturing facility, training center, or community project brings these issues to life and demonstrates the real-world value of decentralized wastewater systems.

5. Coordinate your advocacy through NOWRA.

Share state-specific examples, coordinate messaging, and report your outreach to NOWRA so the association can track Congressional engagement and build a stronger, more coordinated advocacy campaign.



Tim Perrin and Marisa Campbell, TSG Advocates



ADVOCACY EFFORTS

The following companies and organizations are supporters of NOWRA's advocacy efforts for 2026 and comprise our Lobbying Board of Governors.

We thank them for their efforts & support.

- American Manufacturing, Inc.
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- BioMicrobics, Inc.
- Colorado Professionals in Onsite Wastewater
- Eljen Corp.
- Florida Onsite Wastewater Association
- Infiltrator Water Technologies
- Jet, Inc.
- Missouri Smallflows Organization
- National Association of Wastewater Technicians (NAWT)
- Norweco, Inc.
- Ohio Onsite Wastewater Association
- Orenco Systems, Inc.
- Residential Sewage Treatment Co.
- Roth North America
- Virginia Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (VOWRA)

BECOME INVOLVED!

We would welcome your participation on the Board of Governors if you are able to make that commitment. You are also welcome to contribute at a lower level. All of the funds raised go directly to supporting our advocacy efforts.

To find out more about NOWRA's Advocacy activities, visit our [Advocacy website](#) to get more involved or [contact the NOWRA office](#).

2026 Onsite Wastewater



Why attend? The 2026 Onsite Mega-Conference is a collaborative effort between NOWRA and CPOW (Colorado Professionals in Wastewater) in partnership with NAWT (the National Association of Wastewater Technicians) and SORA (the State Onsite Regulators Association). This year's conference will be held October 25–28 at the Westin Westminster in Westminster, Colorado. Now in its twelfth year, the Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference offers high quality education, training, and networking opportunities to grow your career and business.

There's something for everyone. Whether you've got an established career in the decentralized wastewater industry, or you're just beginning, the Mega-Conference has a wide variety of options to meet your education needs. Online professionals from across the nation will be presenting multiple education session tracks. Our Exhibit Hall hosts exhibitors from around the country offering a variety of innovative products and business solutions.

Registration now open!
Early Bird pricing ends on Sept. 20th.

October 25-28, 2026 | Westminster, Colorado
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Conference PREVIEW

You can fulfill your continuing education requirements. In many states, our conference curriculum will qualify for credit hours in licensing or professional certification programs. We are working with our State Affiliates to secure approval for continuing education credit from many states that license or certify installers, service providers, inspectors, and designers. This year's Mega-Conference features multiple education tracks, as well as a NAWT Vacuum Truck training on October 28. The NAWT training does require a separate fee when registering.

Tackle today's challenges and invest in your business. The Mega-conference is an ideal place to learn about today's wastewater challenges and identify new opportunities for your company to grow and expand. Between meeting many of the industry's most progressive and innovative companies in our exhibit hall and attending education sessions, you can get new ideas for building your existing business. Even finding one new idea to help keep your business thriving will more than justify your cost of attending.



Network and have fun. Join with others in the onsite wastewater community to celebrate achievements and take pride in providing clean water. You'll have opportunities to meet and interact with contractors, engineers, designers, service providers, regulators, educators, manufacturers, and distributors who specialize in the onsite wastewater industry. Enjoy a range of networking events and field trips while visiting a new part of the country and building your career.

Opening General Session Speakers



Hear keynote speaker Dr. Yurie Shirakawa, a Manager in the International Affairs Division of the Japan Education Center of Environmental Sanitation, speak about "An International Perspective on Onsite Systems."



Dr. Bryan Brooks will present on the "Identifying Priority Research Questions for Decentralized Wastewater" paper published this year. Andrew Sawyers (EPA) will give updates on federal decentralized wastewater programs.



Tim Perrin, of The Southern Group, LLC, will provide an analysis of the regulatory and legislative landscape, initiatives underway which may have an impact on the onsite/decentralized wastewater industry, and steps the industry can take to increase its influence in Washington on those initiatives.



Mega Conference HIGHLIGHTS

Welcome Reception. Welcome to “Colorful Colorado” reception with food and entertainment sponsored by Infiltrator Water Technologies.

NAWT Post-Conference Vacuum Truck Workshop. On Wednesday, October 29, 2026, NAWT will be offering a Vacuum Truck Technician Course, which will run from 8:00 am until 5:00 PM. The course offers a great educational opportunity whether you are just starting a vacuum truck business or you’re an experienced operator who wants a refresher. A separate registration is required, and there is a discount for NAWT members. For additional information, please see the Optional Post-Conference Vacuum Truck Workshop page on the NOWRA conference website.

Technical Education & Training. With more than 60 sessions to choose from on a variety of topics, the Mega-Conference agenda is packed with opportunities to learn. Speakers from all sectors of the onsite industry

will offer information on nutrients, soils, policy and regulation, installation, design, business management, innovative solutions, emerging issues, and technology.

Exhibit Hall. Our expo hall will be filled with national and local companies exhibiting their latest technologies. Visit them to network and discover innovative solutions.

Backhoe Roe-D-Hoe Contest. Come test your skills in our popular Backhoe Roe-D-Hoe contest during conference breaks.

Support Emerging Professionals. Beginning Sunday afternoon, NOWRA’s Emerging Professionals Committee will host their annual cornhole (or bags) tournament. The competition will begin with twenty teams, and on Monday will hold their championship round. Additional information and instructions to sign up are posted to NOWRA’s website. The tournament benefits the Emerging Professionals Scholarship Fund. The Emerging Professionals will also host a 50/50 raffle.

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Mega Conference **FIELD TRIPS**

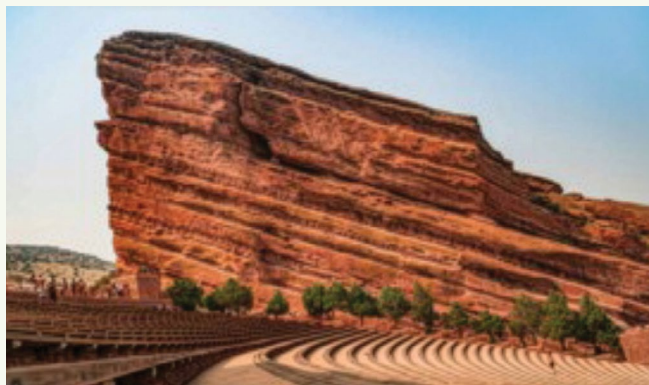
We will be offering a choice of two optional field trips. Pre-registration is required due to expected demand. Each trip will feature multiple stops and lunch will be provided.

FIELD TRIP 1: MOUNTAINS

Participants on this field trip are advised to please wear comfortable walking shoes. This program involves a moderate level of activity. Participants should have the ability to climb stairs, stand for a period, and walk over uneven ground. Most of this tour will involve being in the elements, so please be sure to dress in layers and bring sunscreen.

Stop 1: Red Rocks Park and Amphitheater

Visit one of the most iconic outdoor venues in Colorado. At 6,450 feet above sea level, Red Rocks is a unique transitional zone between the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. We will have a chance to see not only the amphitheater, but the large, commercial onsite wastewater system serving the facility.



Stop 2: AGS Tour at the Idaho Springs Water Reclamation Facility

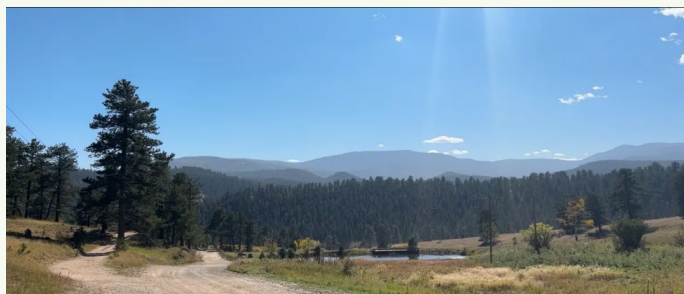
Founded in 1859 after the discovery of gold, Idaho Springs is a popular mountain destination, home to a Gold Mine & Mill Museum, the Indian Hot Springs and geothermal caves, and an active water wheel visible from the passing highway. The Idaho Springs Water Resource Reclamation Facility recently underwent an \$8.3 million expansion that increased facility volume from 0.6 million gallons per day (MGD) to 0.995 MGD. JVA Consulting Engineers provided a comprehensive facility expansion evaluation that assessed numerous wastewater treatment alternatives for their ability to meet increased flows, loads, and stringent nutrient

limitations before settling on Activated Granular Sludge (AGS), which is a new process to the United State.



Stop 3: Orenco System Tour at Mount Blue Sky Outdoor Education Lab

This system consists of a commercial treatment system that serves one of the two Outdoor Educational Lab locations managed by the Jefferson County School District. The Mount Blue Sky Outdoor Education Lab sits on a property originally known as the Dodge Ranch, and boasts a historic lodge and outbuildings surrounded by incredible views. This stop will tour a commercial treatment system that serves one of the two Outdoor Educational Lab locations managed by the Jefferson County School District. The system is permitted for a wastewater flow of 7,500 gpd and consists of a collection system, a primary settling tank followed by an anoxic tank and two Orenco Advantex systems in series for secondary treatment. In addition, filtration using a sand filter, UV disinfection, and chemical feed using ferric chloride, and alkalinity feed provide tertiary treatment to achieve nutrient removal limits. Treated effluent is metered using a magnetic flow meter prior to flows discharging to Haystack Creek.



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Mega Conference **FIELD TRIPS** *(continued)*

FIELD TRIP #2 METRO/ FRONT RANGE

Stop 1: South Platte Renew

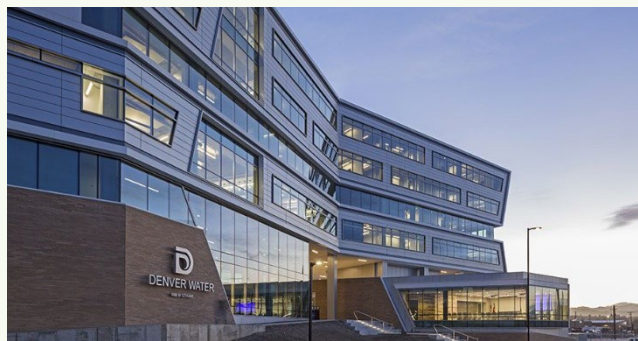
South Platte Renew is a water renewal facility located in South Denver and is responsible for cleaning nearly 20 million gallons of wastewater daily from over 300,000 residents in the surrounding communities. The facility is publicly owned and operated by the Cities of Littleton and Englewood, and began operations in April 1977, after the individual plants in Littleton and Englewood were unable to meet the updated minimum levels of treatment required by the passing of the 1972 Clean Water Act. The collection system follows the natural drainage pattern in the area that leads to the South Platte River. The overall service area includes both cities' own collection systems and systems built and maintained by 19 local connector districts. The South Platte Renew tour is an interactive program that offers visitors a unique behind-the-scenes look at the science and engineering behind wastewater treatment, as well as an understanding of how wastewater management safeguards the environment. The tour takes place outdoors, so please dress accordingly for the weather.



Stop 2: Denver Water/ RUFUS

Denver Water's RUFUS (ReUse for Us) is an innovative, on-site water recycling system that has been in use since 2024 in their administration building, located close to the heart of Denver. The RUFUS system collects water from fixtures across the six-story building, including toilets, urinals & sinks, and then cleans the water for reuse in the building's toilets and urinals. This system is the first of its kind in Colorado to receive approval from state health officials, with other similar systems currently operating in Washington DC, California, Oregon, and Washington, among others. RUFUS was a major piece of a multi-pronged water management & redevelopment effort started by Denver Water in 2012, with the

goal of increasing sustainability through the building during the redevelopment effort started by Denver Water in 2012, with the goal of increasing sustainability through the building during the redevelopment opportunity.



Stop 3: Hydro Building at CSU Spur

Spur Hydro and Water TAP, Colorado State University's Water Technology Acceleration Platform. Participants will split into two groups and rotate through a 30-minute tour of Water TAP's indoor and outdoor research facilities and a 30-minute guided tour of the Hydro building. At Water TAP, you'll explore full-scale pilot and demonstration systems that use graywater, stormwater, rainwater, surface water, and other alternative water sources to evaluate emerg-



ing treatment technologies under real-world conditions. Learn how the facility supports technology validation, applied research, workforce development, and collaboration among utilities, industry, researchers, and regulators to accelerate water innovation. Participants are required to wear closed-toe shoes at the facility, and it is recommended to wear comfortable clothing suited for walking. Please note that the tour includes walking through indoor and outdoor areas, some surfaces may be uneven. Photography is welcome unless otherwise noted for research purposes.

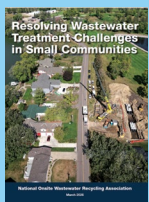
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Completing NOWRA's Second Grant and Launching the Third

By Sara Heger

NOWRA's long-term goal is to build a comprehensive blended-learning training library for onsite and decentralized wastewater operations and management. This library will include in-person and instructor-led online training, webinars, self-paced e-learning modules, and anytime-access tools and resources for system owners and the professionals who support them, including environmental health professionals, installers, realtors, and other stakeholders.

Through our second EPA-funded grant, completed in partnership with RCAP, several new training resources are nearing completion. The materials have been piloted over the past 18 months, and final refinements are now underway. These resources are designed for both online and face-to-face training events.



Resolving Challenges in Small Communities Course

Across the United States, many small communities lack adequate sewage treatment in areas typically served by decentralized systems. Extending municipal sewer service or building a new treatment plant is often not feasible. In many cases, the best path forward is for property owners to work together as a community to address their wastewater needs. Community or cluster systems can be effective solutions for replacing malfunctioning or nonexistent septic systems, but communities need education, technical assistance, and support as they evaluate their options.

Objective – Provide communities with an effective process to identify and address their wastewater needs.

Audience – Small communities facing wastewater challenges, along with the consultants and partners who assist them through the decision-making process.

Approach – Thirteen training modules, case studies, and a manual are available.



Decentralized System Operation and Maintenance Training

The O&M Service Provider Program is designed to establish best-practice standards for service visits to onsite wastewater treatment systems. The materials focus on single-family residential systems and update the Onsite Consortium's Residential Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems: An Operation and Maintenance Service Provider Program.

Objective – Support workforce development in decentralized system operation and maintenance.

Audience – Primary: service providers/operators of decentralized systems. Secondary audiences include local and state permitting staff, designers, engineers, and soil scientists.

Approach – Thirty training modules with checklists, training exercises, homework, and a manual are available.

Solutions for Challenging Sites Curriculum

This curriculum helps onsite professionals identify and evaluate solutions for difficult decentralized wastewater treatment sites. The materials begin with common site challenges and then explore a broad range of approaches that address environmental, public health and practical needs. Topics include heavy clay soils, rapidly permeable soils, high-strength waste, nitrogen treatment, small lots and setbacks, high water tables, steep slopes, and bedrock. Options discussed include surface-discharging and non-discharging systems, cluster systems, equalization, advanced pretreatment systems, shallow dispersal technologies and pressure distribution.

Objective – Offer tools to help decentralized professionals solve problems on difficult sites.

Audience – Designers, engineers, soil scientists, and local and state permitting staff

Approach – Nineteen training modules along with exercises and case studies are available.

continued on next page

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS *(continued)*

Access the Materials

Thanks to EPA funding, these materials are available for shared use to help move the industry forward, support communities, and expand practical solutions for challenging sites.

To request access to these resources, please scan the QR code or by using [this link](#).



New Projects Underway

The third grant is now underway, with several new curriculum and training projects in development:

- **College-Level Curriculum:** A three-credit course that links system design and regulation to fundamental engineering, soil science, and water quality concepts.
- **Decentralized Glossary 2.0:** An expanded and modernized version of the 2009 CIDWT Glossary, developed as a searchable online tool.
- **Monitoring & Troubleshooting:** Advanced training for service providers focused on life-cycle management and field diagnostics.

- **RME Training:** Materials for establishing Responsible Management Entities, featuring real-world case studies and long-term business planning.
- **Regulatory Professional Program:** Skills-based training for officials to strengthen oversight, protect public health, and improve technical problem-solving.

GET INVOLVED!

Stakeholders will help guide the development and refinement of these materials. If you are interested in volunteering your expertise for one or more projects, please complete the interest form at: <https://z.umn.edu/NOWRAgrant>

Questions about these projects may be directed to Sara Heger at sfheger@gmail.com.



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How Will **YOU** Honor SepticSmart Week?

This year, commit to spreading the word about SepticSmart Week in your community from Sept 14-18.

Reach out to your local health regulators, realtors, newspapers, teachers, or government officials. Tell them that proper septic system care and maintenance can save money, safeguard health, and protect the environment. Then ask them to share the EPA's SepticSmart tips!

- Protect It and Inspect It!
- Think at the Sink!
- Don't Overload the Commode!
- Pump Your Tank!
- Don't Strain Your Drain!
- Shield Your Field!
- Keep It Clean!



www.epa.gov/septic/septicsmart



Looking for new resources to share with the public?

1. FREE Interactive Homeowner Course

Many homeowners have onsite wastewater systems, but don't know much about them or how to take care of them. Onsite systems are a vital part of any home's infrastructure and poor maintenance or improper use can lead to costly repairs or replacement. It's an expensive lesson to learn the hard way.

NOWRA developed an interactive homeowner course and guide in partnership with the US EPA and Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP). This guide is for property owners and the general public to help them learn best management practices to keep their systems functioning properly.

The course is offered free of charge on NOWRA's Online Learning Academy website, but does require signup for a free account. [Sign up here](#) for a free NOWRA Online Learning Academy Account.

The homeowner's course can be found [here](#).

2. Check out EPA's SepticSmart Resources

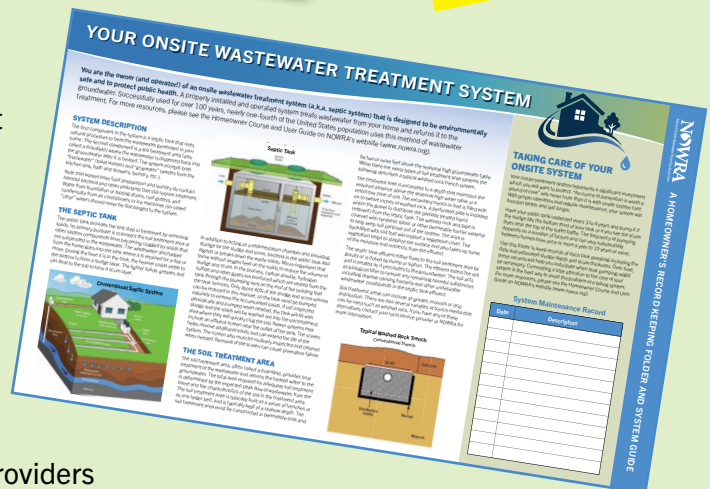
The EPA has many engaging SepticSmart materials for the public to use and disseminate, from videos and social media graphics to door-hangers for realtors and printouts for rental property guests. These resources can all be found [here](#).



3. New and Updated Homeowner Folder

NOWRA has been hard at work updating an important resource for homeowners. The onsite industry stresses the importance of good record keeping as an integral part of onsite system operation and maintenance. It's vital to know when work was done, including pumping or repairs, and who was hired to do the work.

NOWRA's homeowner folder is a great way to not only log when work was done, but keep all receipts and records together in one place. The updated folder features new, clearer graphics in full color and improved system information prompts to help homeowners give the detail that will help future service providers determine the components present. This can lead to faster troubleshooting, which may help reduce costs if repairs are needed.



Additionally, the homeowner folder is printed with basic onsite system information, to help inform homeowners about what onsite systems are and steps they likely need to take to maintain theirs.

We have included a space for local installers, designers, or service providers to put their information on the folder to make it easier for homeowners to contact them. **The new homeowner folder is available from NOWRA on [our website](#) starting SepticSmart Week 2026.**

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Roth Announces Key Sales Leadership Promotions and Expands North American Sales Team

SYRACUSE, NY – Roth is pleased to announce three leadership promotions and the addition of three Regional Sales Managers as the company continues to strengthen its North American sales organization to support continued growth and customer service.

Effective immediately, Justin Spaulding has been promoted to Vice President of Sales—East, and Matt Gibbs has been promoted to Vice President of Sales—West.

Spaulding joined Roth as a Regional Sales Manager in July 2017, while Gibbs joined the company in April 2018. Since then, both have played key roles in strengthening customer relationships, expanding Roth's presence, and driving sales growth across their respective territories. In their new leadership roles, Spaulding and Gibbs will help guide Roth's continued growth throughout North America by strengthening communication across sales teams, supporting strategic initiatives, and expanding the company's product portfolio. Both will continue serving the customers and territories they have supported over the years. "Justin and Matt have consistently demonstrated outstanding leadership, dedication, and commitment to our customers and our team," said Joseph A. Brown, President & CEO of Roth. "Their promotions reflect the tremendous impact they've had on our success and position us well for the next phase of our growth."

Roth has also announced the promotion of David Hull to the newly created position of National Sales Manager, Lubricant Division.

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A Cautionary Tale and A Story of Hope

By Stuart Coleman

The state of Hawaii faces the massive issue of how to convert 83,000 cesspools that are polluting our waters. With an average cost of \$30,000 to \$50,000 per conversion, that's a \$2-\$4 billion problem. Homeowners alone can't afford the costs of fixing the problems on their own so the question on people's minds is this: Can the state work with the feds and counties to come up with a coherent strategy about how to convert these substandard systems?

Government leaders like Gov. Josh Green and House Speaker Nadine Nakamura have made cesspool conversions a top priority of the state. Hawaii's mayors and county council members are aware of the problem but keep kicking the can down the road. The Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) has yet to come up with a clear strategic plan, but officials have created a Cesspool Conversion Implementation Group to find solutions.

The only place in the U.S. that has more cesspools than Hawaii is Long Island in Suffolk County, NY. Hawaii still has the most per capita with 83,000, but Suffolk County has the most in terms of sheer numbers with

over 380,000! The legacy of cesspools there has created serious threats to the environment, human health and the economy that can serve as lessons for Hawaii.

As different as they are, Long Island and Hawaii share many intriguing parallels. Both experienced boom and bust cycles of rapid residential development, resulting in a lack of planning and sanitation infrastructure. The result was a proliferation of cesspools, sewage pollution and water quality issues.

What happened in Suffolk County is a cautionary tale of what can happen in Hawaii if the problem goes untreated. But it is also an inspiring story of how a group of visionary government leaders found a way to deal with the problem, and their solutions provide a template for Hawaii and other states to follow.

A Massive, Slow-Motion Sewage Spill

Sometimes it takes a major crisis to spur people into action. Ted Bohlen moved to Hawaii from the East Coast in 2006, partly drawn to the pristine waters of the Islands. A lawyer, he landed a job as the Deputy Attorney General for the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) and embraced the department's goals to protect public health and the environment.

Unfortunately, on his first day of work, a massive sewage spill erupted in Waikiki. A main sewer line broke open, and a toxic river of brown waste flowed into the Ala Wai Canal and out into the ocean for days. The



Ted Bohlen

spill would eventually discharge more than 48 million gallons of raw sewage into the Canal and surrounding waters. The event made international headlines and caused the closure of beaches in Waikiki.

Bohlen recalls how a man with a compromised immune system fell into the Ala Wai Canal and became infected with a deadly virus known as vibrio. He died in the hospital soon after. More than an environmental nightmare, the sewage spill was a health crisis that transformed Bohlen's life. "Suddenly, the public realized how dangerous polluted water could be."

Dealing with the sewer spill crisis, Bohlen realized it was partly due to aging infrastructure. During this time, he learned more about Hawaii's cesspool issues and how these substandard systems were also polluting the state's waters beneath the surface. Over time, he realized that cesspools generated more waste each day than the state's largest sewage spill in 2006.

While the spill in Waikiki was 48 million gallons, Hawaii's 83,000

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About the Author: Stuart Coleman is the Executive Director and Co-founder of the nonprofit WAI: Wastewater Alternatives & Innovations. He is also a freelance journalist and the author of three books, including the award-winning biography *Eddie Would Go*. He will also be presenting on this topic at the 2026 Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference.

A Cautionary Tale and A Story of Hope *(continued)*

cesspools discharge more 52 million gallons of raw sewage into our groundwater each day! It was like a massive, slow-motion sewage spill beneath the surface, going on every day for decades, yet people just couldn't see it. "I became aware that cesspools were the largest water pollution issue in the state."

During his time as the DOH's Deputy AG, Bohlen recruited younger activists and environmental groups like the Surfrider Foundation to work on policies to reduce cesspool pollution. Together, they helped pass laws to ban the construction of new cesspools and mandate the conversion of all cesspools by 2050 (Act 125, 2017). But with current rate of 400 cesspool conversions per year, that rate will need to increase eight-fold to meet the 2050 deadline.

In the face of these challenges, some legislators and homeowners try to downplay the issue and say cesspools are not a major problem. But Roger Babcock, Director of Honolulu's Department of Environment Services, says, "Cesspools are a primitive form of wastewater disposal. So it's disposal, not treatment." Babcock adds that cesspools are "basically like having an outhouse in your front yard. Would you go out and do your business right out in your front yard in a pit, every day? I don't think that's what people really want."

It's natural to wonder how such a primitive form of sanitation became so common in Hawaii. "People don't realize that cesspools were a temporary fix," Babcock says. "They were never intended to be a long-term solution. It's just that development happened so fast and the infrastructure couldn't keep up with the pace of building." It turns out that this was a common problem across the country,

particularly in fast-growing places like Long Island.

Brown Tides and Toxic Algal Blooms

The cold waters around Long Island were once the home of the most productive fisheries in the country. Generations of fishermen worked in their boats to bring in bountiful harvests of clams, scallops, oysters and other shellfish that fed expanding seafood markets across the country.

When Walter Dawydiak moved to Long Island in the 1980s, he felt like it was a kind of Eden compared to New York City. On weekends, he would go clamming and scalloping and bring home fresh seafood for his family. Trained as an engineer, he worked at the Suffolk County Department of Health and enjoyed his suburban lifestyle. But as a public health official, he became aware of the rapid pace of development and lack of sewer infrastructure.

"A lot of Suffolk County was planning for regional sewage treatment plants, and they would allow houses to come in with temporary cesspools," Dawydiak says. "But the sewage treatment plants were never built so that they basically became permanent cesspools." These substandard systems didn't seem to be a problem at first, but then everything changed in the mid-1980s.

Like a plague, "brown tides" swept over the waters, and the shellfish

started to disappear. "The brown tide killed all the bay scallops," Dawydiak says. "All the eelgrass beds disappeared." These toxic algal blooms also led to massive fish-kills and die-offs that would devastate local communities that depended on fishing and tourism.

The devastation to the ecosystem was so severe that 99% of the shellfish industry crashed. Thousands of fishermen lost their jobs. The local economy and housing market took a downturn. As the head of the health department, Dawydiak says, "We were all faced with the task of figuring out what happened."

Top scientists were summoned to help figure out what was causing the brown tides and the collapse of the shellfish industry. Chris Gobler, a researcher at nearby Stony Brook University, finally found the source: excessive nutrient loading and toxic pathogens from all the cesspools and failing septic systems. "We had over-polluted our environment and had to find ways to fix it," Dawydiak says.

Reclaim Our Water

Armed with years of research and data, Chris Gobler began sounding the alarm. He spoke to environmental leaders, community groups and government officials about the need to protect water quality by reducing the nutrient loading of nitrogen and phosphorus from the more than 380,000 cesspools in Suffolk County. "We called him the Paul Revere of water quality on Long Island," says Dorian Dale, Director of Sustainability for Suffolk County.

Dale and his team embraced Gobler's cutting-edge scientific work on harmful algal blooms, and they amplified his warning about the need



Walter Dawydiak

to reduce nitrogen loading and convert the cesspools. With so many job losses, environmental crises and economic impacts, the message resounded across the county.

Dorian Dale worked with Walter Dawydiak at the Department of Health and Sarah Landsdale at the Planning Office. Together, the newly formed team asked their boss Steve Bellone, the Suffolk County Executive, to help them come up with a plan to solve the problem.

Those meetings with Bellone helped launch a movement. Instead of kicking the can down the road, the group decided that decisive action was needed. Bellone set up a press conference and proclaimed that it was time to cut the crap and stop polluting their waterways and fisheries. “I’ll never forget the moment he did this because it was life-changing,” recalls Walt Dawydiak. “It was a John F. Kennedy moment, and he said, ‘If not us, who. If not now, when?’ He said, ‘We’re going to step up and do our part.’”

Suffolk County put tens of millions of dollars into coming up with a strategic plan, staffing up and setting up grants to help homeowners with the costs of converting their cesspools. Bellone’s central message about the need to “reclaim our water” became the rallying cry for the movement and the official name of the campaign.

His decisive, impassioned message transformed everyone involved. Dale says that Dawydiak could have been “just another bureaucratic road-block, a guy who’s just collecting his

pension.” Instead, he became a transformational leader. While working full time, Dawydiak went to law school at night to learn how to create more effective policies. “I mean, Walter ends up being a superhero,” Dale says.

The Magical Septic Tour

As the Director of Planning, Sarah Landsdale decided that they should find out what other states in the area were doing about the issue. In 2014, Landsdale gathered Walt Dawydiak, Dorian Dale and a handful of other agency leaders, and they took a 3-day road trip along the Northeast coast to talk with other state and county leaders. They learned that Rhode Island had the best regulatory policies for requiring better treatment systems that reduced nitrogen loading; Maryland had the best model for raising funds to help homeowners with the cost of conversions; and Massachusetts had the best testing center to approve better treatment technologies.

Borrowing best practices from these other states, the road trip proved to be a game changer for the county. Dorian Dale dubbed it the “Magical Septic Tour.” The experience made them realize they were on a common

journey to solve a problem that affects many parts of the country, including Hawaii. “The principal mission is water quality,” Dale says. “And that’s why I’m concerned about your water quality [in Hawaii]. It’s a shared struggle.”

Over the next ten years, they created new policies that could be a successful model for Hawaii’s Department of Health. Suffolk County required denitrifying treatment systems in coastal areas and new developments, and they fast-tracked the permitting process for cesspool conversions. The cost of conversions is still a major issue, but Suffolk County passed a bill to increase the sales tax by an eighth of a penny to create hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to help homeowners upgrade their cesspools and septic systems.

These policy and funding innovations have increased the rate of conversions and reduced the amount of sewage pollution and nutrient loading, while also improving their water quality and quality of life. But in Hawaii, there is still no strategic plan or dedicated source of funding to help homeowners with the high costs of converting their cesspools.

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Sarah Landsdale and Dorian Dale



The Magical Septic Tour

A Cautionary Tale and A Story of Hope *(continued)*

Implications for Hawaii

What happened on Long Island clearly has powerful implications for the Hawaiian Islands. While Suffolk County has made substantial progress in converting thousands of cesspools each year, Hawaii's conversion rate is stagnant. Meanwhile, the pathogens and nutrient loading from cesspools in coastal areas are leading to serious declines in water quality, fisheries and coral reefs.

Just as Chris Gobler showed how nutrient pollution was causing toxic algal blooms and killing the shellfish industry in Suffolk County, Greg Asner has been sounding a similar alarm about how nitrogen loading is having the same harmful effects on Hawaii's coral reefs. A Navy veteran and ASU professor based in Hawaii, Asner is a leading researcher on coral reefs and says that nutrients like nitrogen lead to algal overgrowth that smothers the reefs. When combined with stormwater run-off, declining fish populations and the "toxic cocktail" of wastewater pollutants, he says these stressors are killing the state's corals.

On many coastlines, Asner says. "The high pollution areas already have seen massive decline." Once vibrant reefs have been reduced to coral rubble in places across the

state, including Puako and Kahalu'u on Hawaii Island, Ma'alaea and Kahekili on Maui and Kaneohe Bay on Oahu. In numerous ways, our state's future depends on the health of our remaining reefs. NOAA has estimated that Hawaii's coral reefs contribute an estimated \$863 million per year to Hawaii's economy.

When asked about the consequences of losing our coral reefs, Asner explains that the losses are too large and hard to calculate. "There will be more and more coastal erosion, more and more loss of homes and livelihoods and economy along the coastline," Asner says. "The fabric of the entire coastline is pulled apart when you have these losses."

Due to Hawaii's dependence on tourism, the loss of the state's coral reefs would be economically devastating. "Our visitor industry is the lifeblood for our economy," says Ted Bohlen, "and people aren't going to want to go to the beach when they know that the water is polluted."

He is also worried about the health effects of sewage pollution, especially when it comes to our drinking water. A decade ago, a Department Of Health study in East Hawaii found fecal indicator bacteria in 50% of private drinking water wells sampled. Besides the 'ick' factor, that's a health crisis in the making.

Like the folks in Suffolk County, Bohlen believes the state should hire more staff at DOH to come up with an actionable plan to convert cesspools in coastal priority areas. Like Suffolk County, he says the state should adopt policies to do the following: develop new revenue sources and create grants to help homeowners convert their cesspools; create a

new cesspool section at DOH to streamline permitting regulations and speed up the rate of conversions; and fast-track approval of more affordable treatment technologies that reduce pathogens and nutrient loading to protect water quality and coral reefs.

Though he retired from the Hawaii Department of Health in 2022, Ted Bohlen continues to collaborate with the department. He also helps guide policy for a coalition of nonprofit groups and young activists who are working on cesspool issues. "It gives me a sense of purpose and makes me feel that I'm working on something worthwhile," Bohlen says.

Likewise, after retiring from Suffolk County's Department of Health, Walter Dawydiak continues to work on wastewater issues. "I felt like I spent 40 years accumulating all of this information that could still be useful to somebody," Dawydiak says. "So I thought I should try to be helpful and pass it on." He and Dorian Dale have both offered to help the Hawaii Department of Health, sharing lessons learned and success stories from Suffolk County.

In the face of government shutdowns and bureaucracy, both Dawydiak and Bohlen are exemplars of public service and government efficiency at its most effective. This kind of hard work and dedication is desperately needed these days to solve complex problems and restore faith in our government.

When it comes to crappy issues like converting cesspools, these public servants demonstrate how we can work together to 'cut the crap' and put these vexing problems behind us.



Greg Asner

Diamond Level



Gold Level



Silver Level

BioMicrobics, Inc.

Ecological Tanks

FujiClean USA

National Precast Concrete Association (NPCA)

Orenco Systems

Polylok

Bronze Level

Anua

Hoot Systems, LLC

Roth Global Plastics

WaterColor Insurance
Management

Wieser Concrete

Copper Level

Ashland Water Group

Inspector Cameras, LLC

JNM Technologies, Inc./LWRE

Hiblow USA, Inc.

Premier Tech Water
& Environment

Residential Sewage
Treatment Company

Pewter Level

10X Business Broker
Mergers & Acquisitions

Apollo Insurance Group

Arris Water Treatment
& Technology

Imperial Industries

NSF International

RioVation

SJE Rhombus

SludgeHammer Group, Ltd.

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Online Courses to Meet Everyone's Needs

NOWRA's Online Learning Academy makes it easy for you to obtain high quality onsite wastewater training by bringing the classes to you! It's a great option when:

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- you need to better understand onsite wastewater fundamentals.

Our suite of courses has been developed by respected industry professionals from academia, engineering, soil science, and contracting. Each course offers a dynamic mix of classroom lectures, external videos and required readings, along with periodic tests of your knowledge. When you pass a course, you get a personalized Certificate of Completion, which can be used as continuing education documentation.

► Onsite A to Z

An overview of onsite wastewater treatment provides a foundation of relevant courses for many professionals.

► Installer Training

Ideal for new installers, those preparing for a certification exam, or those looking to brush up on skills.

► Troubleshooting

Step-by-step component troubleshooting—for designers, installers, regulators, service providers and more!

► Design Courses

These courses lay the groundwork for design and are continuously being expanded with new additions.

► Technical Sessions

These courses cover a wide variety of topics and were selected for their continued relevancy to the decentralized industry.

NOWRA is excited to offer five new design courses!

1. **Design: Disinfection in OWT Systems** — Gives an overview of why disinfection is important for onsite systems and how two of those methods function.
2. **Design: Community System Management Programs —Avoiding the Pitfalls** — Gain a better understanding of decentralized community systems and how to structure management and oversight of community systems.
3. **Design: Phosphorus Reduction Techniques** — Discusses the impacts of phosphorus on fresh water and how phosphorus can be reduced through treatment.
4. **Design: Commercial System Considerations** — Describes how commercial systems generate higher strength or difficult to treat wastewater and provides information to solve these treatment challenges.
5. **Design: Multiple Tanks** — Gives an overview of how multiple tanks in an onsite system function, when they're needed, and how to operate and maintain them.

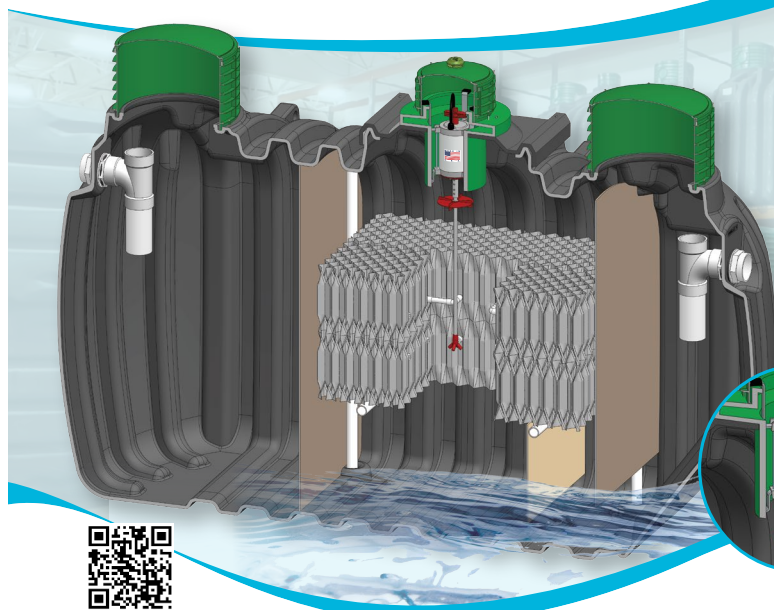
We are pleased to expand our design courses. If you have topics you would like to see NOWRA cover in future courses, please contact us at outreach@nowra.org. We are always interested in providing quality education resources to the onsite industry.

FREE BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY COURSES

The NOWRA Online Learning Academy also has free online business and regulator courses available for our members and affiliates.

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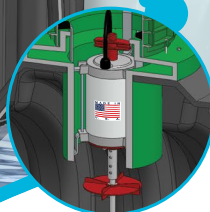
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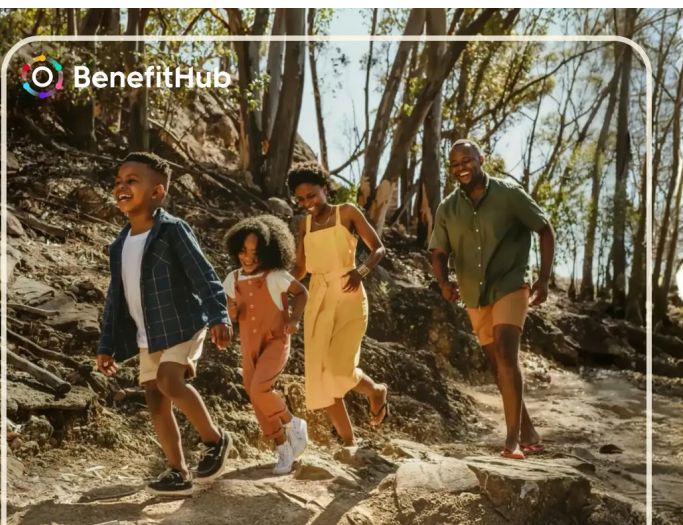
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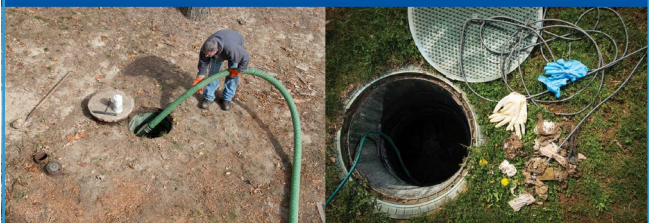
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HELP US EDUCATE HOMEOWNERS

NOWRA's **Online Learning Academy** now includes a free, online training module to educate homeowners about their onsite wastewater systems.

The **Homeowner's Education Course** was designed to be an engaging way for people to learn the basics of onsite treatment and maintenance. While the training's target audience is property owners with onsite systems, the concepts are also applicable to the general public, realtors, local health officials, and septic system professionals.

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Onsite Wastewater
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Homeowner
Education



This course is designed to help homeowners get the most out of their Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS). Select the Start button in the course header to get started, or select a topic in the outline below to jump to a specific section.

Concepts covered in this short and easy-to-use training module include: the importance of wastewater treatment, an overview of treatment in an onsite system, typical onsite system features, final treatment and dispersal, management, maintenance, safety, and system troubleshooting.

The Homeowner's Education Course was developed through a U.S. EPA grant and in partnership with the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP).

This course is free but users must create an account on [NOWRA's Online Learning Academy](#)

Questions about this course should be directed to NOWRA at info@nowra.org.