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**Without intervention Illinois annual septic system inspections will cost us**

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**By Jo McCord**

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Without intervention by the Illinois Legislature, countless rural and small-town home and business owners in Illinois will face expensive annual septic system inspections.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency wants all property owners in the state that use "surface discharging" sewage systems or septic systems to obtain a "national pollution discharge elimination system" permit and to have their systems tested annually.

This would not apply to septic systems with leach fields in which effluent seeps into the soil, but only to those that discharge effluent off the property.

IEPA spokesman Jill Watson says it's a matter of federal law, that the agency is just trying to comply with the federal law.

"This is a requirement of the (U.S.) Clean Water Act and the IEPA is required to implement this NPDES permit for systems owned by private homeowners," Watson said.

The federal law "requires that surface discharging sewage systems be maintained and inspected twice per year to assure that the systems are treating sewage adequately.

"The basic ideology," she continued, "is that a system checked and maintained is less likely to fail and contaminate."

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She says the state is working with local health departments to "assure that the permitting responsibilities can be accomplished."

## Opposition

John Pickering, administrator of the Ford-Iroquois Public Health Department, opposes the permitting requirement for most private septic users, labeling the proposal "Draconian." Hundreds of Iroquois County property owners would be affected, he said - primarily residents of small towns and rural subdivisions.

Last week he came to the Iroquois County Board to urge its support of legislation intended to block the permit requirement. Board member John Dowling, the health committee chairman, gave his support.

The board voted 19-0 to support House Bill 5822, which would exempt systems that don't discharge directly into a stream. Chief sponsors are Republican Reps. Roger Eddy, the former Watseka High School principal now school superintendent at Hutsonville, and Chapin Rose of Mahomet. Rep. Quen Cultra, R-Onarga, is a co-sponsor. The bill was filed on August 11 and the legislature hasn't been in session since then.

## Every house & business

"In our area and in most small towns the common septic system was an off-area discharge septic tank that goes into a tile and ends up in a drainage district or a creek," he said. "For Onarga, every house and every business was hooked up like that"

"It's not all bad if the septic system is working properly. You wouldn't want to drink it, but it's not sending straight sewage," Cultra said.

'Unnecessary, costly'

Pickering believes the annual inspections would be unnecessary and costly burdens. He estimates the annual inspection cost at \$500. Watson said \$150 to \$250.

Whichever, Pickering thinks the inspections are generally unnecessary.

"Where systems are correctly installed and the flow is less than 1,500 gallons (per day), we don't need these Draconian measures," he said. "... We are saying the existing rules are sufficient, tried and true."

Existing rules require chlorination of the effluent prior to discharge and proper maintenance of the equipment, he said. There are no regulatory inspections.

"It's an honor system. I don't believe that most people are dishonorable," Pickering said.

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