

NCHD evaluates proposed septic system guideline changes

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Environmental health issues, some which could mean an increase in fees for local homeowners, have been the topic of discussion for members of the Northeast Colorado Board of Health.

Julie McCaleb, environmental health director for the Northeast Colorado Health Department (NCHD), told the board about some pressing concerns coming out of stakeholder subcommittee meetings across the state regarding Individual Sewage Disposal System Guidelines. These guidelines regulate septic systems, also known as onsite wastewater systems, and any changes in the guidelines made at the state level would have to be enforced at the local level.

According to McCaleb, one of the more pressing concerns is coming from a subcommittee discussing changing how long a septic permit is good for. Currently under NCHD's regulations, a permit and the accompanying fee is only required once; at the time any new system is installed, at a cost of \$600, or when an old system is repaired, at a cost of \$400.

Members in this particular subcommittee are discussing the possibility of implementing a permit process that would require renewal every five years. In order for the renewal to be granted the owner would have to pay a proposed cost of \$360 for a renewal permit by showing proof of pumping or having an onsite evaluation of the system to determine if it is functioning properly.

Board members and NCHD staff think NCHD's current system of permitting is sufficient and believe these added costs would hurt local homeowners. They also fear the added fees may lead some homeowners to find ways around the renewal process that could wind up hurting the environment in the long run.

A second subcommittee is discussing lifting the fee cap of \$1,000 for a system permit. McCaleb said she doesn't foresee NCHD's permit fees reaching that limit anytime in the near future, but is concerned because the committee is discussing adding additional fees to the permits that would help establish a fund to assist those that can't pay to have their septic systems upgraded.

A third subcommittee is discussing the 2,000 gallon limit requirement that is in the current regulations. State statute requires systems that generate over 2,000 gallons per day be

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permitted by the state health department, rather than the local health department.

McCaleb said this has been a concern in the past for some of the rural schools and restaurants in northeast Colorado as the permitting process through the state can take anywhere from 45 days to 10 months, depending on what type of information is submitted for review. That lengthy process can hold up a facilities' ability to continue to do business.

McCaleb said this is one part of the regulations she has been pushing to change for many years, saying the state has admitted there is no science behind the 2,000 gallon limit. She and the board would like to see the limit removed so area schools and restaurants can move through the permitting process faster on the local level. At the very least she said she hopes this subcommittee establishes what size system the science does support in requiring the permits to come from the state level.

McCaleb, several of her staff and some board members will be participating in these subcommittee meetings as they continue through the coming months, to ensure the voice of rural residential properties in northeast Colorado is represented.