

SSTS Advisory Committee Notes

March 6th, 2017

Attendee's: *Jim Ziegler, Jim Larson, Cindy Tiemann, Sara Heger, Lisa McCormick, Stacey Feser, Brandon Montgomery, Tom Girtz, Pete Otterness, Cody Robinson, Troy Johnson, Aaron Jensen, Nick Haig, Wayne Johnson, Jeff Iverson, Theresa Haugen, and Brent Rud.*

*10:00 – 10:10 AM Introductions, agenda review, new appointments and vacancies on Committees.
Sara Heger & Aaron Jensen*

Farewell to Ron Thompson, who recently retired from MDH – thank you for your many years of service to the SSTS AC.

Welcomed Troy Johnson as a non-voting member representative from the Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association.

Vacancies:

SW MN has a vacancy

North Central – vacant, but Mark Latterell has a pending application

NE, NW, and SW professionals have vacancies

Expiring soon:

Dick Vuckonich and Ben Oleson expire in October; this is the second term for both.

New Agenda Items:

1. U of M SSTS Manual is being updated – solicitation for comments, review, etc.

10:10 – 10:30 AM MPCA short update items

Goal -- AC informed of ongoing activity

1. Talking Tour Results – Aaron Jensen

13 meetings were held in January and were well received and attended. More people (125) but fewer programs (79) were represented than in 2016. Aaron has compiled the notes and comments and will be posting this to the website soon. The MPCA SSTS team reviews these comments and prioritizes issues to address. Jim pointed out that the MPCA should better communicate how we address these issues. Pete noted that diversity of MPCA representatives added “flavor” to the discussion. Troy asked for common themes, which included, questions about website organization, search tool, regional – enforcement issues, quality of work discussions, professional availability/scarcities/looming retirements vary by region and were identified as worrisome in some areas. Another item that comes out of these meetings is idea sharing across SSTS jurisdiction – e.g. managing point-of-sale

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elements to the program. On that note, there were discussions about how programs could work together.

Pete highlighted emergence of 17 (of 23) SE counties regional septic regulators group aimed at helping foster idea sharing, training for new inspectors, and identification and addressing of issues facing their areas. The group can hash out issues and work together about how to strategically implement elements of the programs. Districts E and F of MCPZA are represented. Their first meeting will be held at the end of March, with plans to meet quarterly.

Pete was asked how he organized this group. He stated that he just asked if there was a need for open communication and collaborative problem-solving especially to help young professionals and folks thought it was a good idea. Others expressed a need/desire for a similar network, especially in Northwest and Central MN. Pete agreed to keep the SSTS AC informed of how things progress and to assist others in developing their own regional McSiug meetings. (MN County Septic Inspector's Users Group).

2. Annual Report – Cody Robinson

Cody gave an update on the annual report collection efforts. Request for annual reports went out on 12/20. As of this past Thursday, 216 are in, 7 aren't in yet. Cody will send out one final email message to the LGU's who have not reported yet. Cody mentioned that the progress for transitioning to an online survey is getting closer to completion and the MPCA will use this year's data to test it out. We would like to have a full report for the 2016 data around June.

3. Website/Empower the Homeowner – Cody Robinson

Cody presented how the MPCA is planning to reorganize the website. They have sent a framework to MPCA Web Team. There will be new content for homeowners. Forms and factsheets will appear on a separate page. Obsolete information will be weeded out. Wayne commented that link color on white background makes it difficult to read. Feedback – SSTS Search is an important tool and the group would like to see it working soon Tank reporting on the annual report – this feature works nicely.

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Empowering the homeowner – Cody presented a proof of a magnet (see attached below) that could be used as an outreach tool to educate system owners about the need for proper system management. He noted that one issue right now is that it is difficult to write on the magnet because of the UV protective layer – which helps make it durable. Some discussion ensued – people really liked the professionals tracking this.

Wayne proposed emailing SSTS owners – Well Owners network style. Discussion pointed out that homeowners are finicky and the best way to approach them is varied.

A template will be shared with LGUs and professionals, which appealed to the group.

4. TAP Update – Cody Robinson

CoCo filter has been registered.

Aquapoint Bioclere tricking filter bed is coming for discussion at the 4/20 meeting

MPCA is tracking five interested manufacturers that have asked for guidance about the application process: Fuji Clean USA, Enviro-cycle, Jet Wastewater Treatment Solutions, Busse Green Technologies, and Eljen for distribution media.

Five products were renewed in 2016.

Tanks must send in water tightness testing results (1 tank/year/model) annually, but not full registration engineering documentation every year.

10:30 – 11:30 AM *Programing and Policy discussions*

Goal -- AC informed of ongoing activity and provides input and approval

1. Continuing Education Credits -- Aaron Jensen

Aaron asked for feedback re: discussions related to direct/related CEU credits and the role of CEUs in our industry. Should there be more flexibility be added for what constitutes CEU? Are folks open to having a larger CE requirement?

Currently, SSTS professionals must have ½ of their training be directly related to Minnesota's SSTS program. ½ of the CEUs can be related to sewage treatment (not necessarily Minnesota program specific).

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One concern raised was inconsistency in identical applications/topics – pointing to the possibility of subjectivity in the process. Also, when an applicant asks for a reason about why they were not accredited, the group agreed there should be an answer.

Wayne noted that a triannual requirement is not adequate and that annual requirements of 6 hours/year would better meet the education needs of SSTS professionals. Brent pointed out that location/frequency is an issue for more remote locations.

Stacey identified continuing education quality as an important piece of the puzzle. The specificity of the content and its application to the SSTS trade is imperative to improving the practices of the professionals that serve this industry.

Tom feels more comfortable with highly competent professionals – and that 1 day/year is not unreasonable.

Troy stated online training was identified as one way to improve access to specific training. Cindy asked what is the barrier to online training? Sara said the U of M's issue relates to a human resource and expertise issue. The MPCA is cautious in accrediting training – has drafted some policy re: online training and will review developed online content for accreditation purposes as it comes in. MPCA hasn't heard the cry for the dire need for this type of training for credit, given the relatively small number of credits required. Troy pointed out that MOWA has identified the need and desire for online training – what is missing is a framework to define online training policy and rules.

Sara identified that NOWRA has recently invested in a delivery platform, but it can't identify the user and doesn't have a quality control mechanism.

Sara brought the conversation back to the original topic about – the number of credits and the types of experiences that warrant CE. What does the group think?

Brent said the number of credits are good, and the type and availability of training is also adequate.

The group agreed that there is value to informing the audience that “related” credits matter, and in many cases are just as important as direct.

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2. Advanced Inspector Grant – Aaron Jensen

Aaron Provided an update on the AI grant. Currently there are twenty-three counties participating in the AI grant. There are an additional two counties in process of signing up. All of these JPA contracts will expire January 31st of 2018. Over the course of the grant, which started in May of 2013, there have been eight payments made to counties totaling \$10,122.98 dollars. Over the life of the grant, \$140,802.73 has been set aside and \$117,981.93 has been returned to the Clean Water Fund as unspent. We still have \$22,820.84 available to grant to the remaining JPA's until the expiration in January 2018.

Feedback was sought about roles of AI grant.

May 2013 was the program inception that provides 75% of expenses for Advanced Inspector work – reviewing designs and inspecting systems. There are 23 agreements set up with counties. 2 are in process. Over four years there have been 8 payments totaling about \$10,000. \$140,000 was allocated to this purpose. \$117,000 has gone back to CW fund. Sara asked if there is any way the county could use those resources to get somebody certified as an Advanced Inspector. Jim said it hasn't been used enough to justify continued time and expense of managing the grant. The money could be put to better use in the low income fix-up fund. Pete pointed out the compliance management portion of advanced inspector work, which is just as, if not more resource intensive. The discussion is really about helping the counties do what they need to do – advanced inspector work is a part of administering an SSTS program. Incentive grants do exist and perhaps the right place for these.

This money was used to incentivize the adoption of the advanced requirements when the new rules went through, and there is a need to help LGUs adopt advanced compliance management practices – from design review and permitting, construction practices and inspection, and ongoing compliance management. A part of this is having qualified professionals, and another part is having competent regulators. Both are needed to make this work.

3. Add Number of Low Income Grant Fixes to the annual report – Aaron Jensen

Low-income grants are awarded to roughly 40 counties, and reporting through e-link is sometimes difficult to decipher. Someone proposed that the MPCA talk to BWSR to see if they will ask for the number of new systems installed through e-Link.

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4. Tank Pumping at Inspection – Brandon Montgomery

Request for rule- in order to pass a tank's compliance status, you must pump and observe a tank through the maintenance hole for at the time of inspection.

Nick asked if there are tanks without maintenance hole covers that meet existing system compliance criteria. The consensus of the group was that those tanks need to be replaced. The group agreed that the tank pumping requirement at inspection SHOULD state that the maintenance and tank observation take place through a maintenance hole. The form may need to be adjusted – to ensure a certified Maintainer or Inspector conducted the necessary steps to certify a tank as compliant.

11:30 – 12:00 PM Member topics

Goal – Members bring up topics for discussion and consideration

U of M SSTS Manual – is being updated and the U of M would appreciate any comments or corrections this spring. There will be a need for information and communication as upcoming changes

- Annual Report email*
- SSTS Bulletin*

Vertical separation and separation assessment for compliance inspections

-Troy thinks the rule is too complicated because inspectors have to attach adequate documentation to define the compliance status of a system.

Questions – Cindy asked how many counties are doing soil borings for the verification of site suitability for land application. Neither the MPCA nor the group was not aware of any LGUs that require field verification of site suitability. Brent said he has heard of a couple LGUs that have done some verification procedure when questions arose. She is curious about:

- 1. Who can do the work?*
- 2. What is the protocol for assuring site suitability*

2017 dates:

*June 8 (CONFERENCE CALL),
September 14 (CONFERENCE CALL),
December 1 (IN-PERSON)*

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