

details on assessing, developing, implementing, and sustaining a viable management program.

All aspects of a management program are covered, including public education and participation, planning, performance criteria, site evaluation, design, construction, operation and maintenance, residuals management, training and certification/licensing, inspections/monitoring, corrective actions, record keeping/reporting, and financial assistance. To address these elements of comprehensive management programs, the Management Handbook will include the following:

- Public awareness and education tools

- Case studies of management programs

- Options for inventories
- Funding examples
- Model codes and ordinances
- Examples of septage management

The primary audience for the Management Handbook are state, tribal and local regulators and community officials that are responsible for regulating onsite and clustered systems.

Onsite and clustered wastewater treatment systems currently serve about 25 percent of U.S. homes and approximately 33 percent of new development. The vast majority of these systems are conventional onsite wastewater treatment systems (septic systems). States report that these wastewater treatment systems have failed because of inappropriate siting or design or inadequate long-term maintenance and that septic tank systems constitute the third most common source of ground water contamination. Historically high failure rates in some areas indicate a need for better management of these systems to protect public health and water quality. When onsite and clustered wastewater treatment systems are properly managed, they may, in many cases, be the most practical and least expensive way to treat household wastewater.

In April, 1997, EPA prepared its "Response to Congress on the Use of Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems." The report concluded that decentralized wastewater treatment technologies offer a cost-effective, long term wastewater treatment solution for many communities. However, the report emphasized that decentralized technologies must be implemented in the context of a responsible management program to consistently achieve water quality and public health goals. The report identified the current lack of management as a barrier to successfully applying these otherwise promising technologies.

In response to the need for improved management, EPA prepared a concept paper in the spring of 1999, which received considerable input from various stakeholders, including other federal agencies, state health agencies, environmental groups, trade associations and public interest groups. Based on comments received, EPA developed the draft Management Guidelines which were published in October 2000, along with an annotated outline of this draft handbook. Comments were once again solicited, resulting in the final Management Guidelines and this draft Management Handbook.

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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Voluntary National Guidelines for Management of Onsite and Clustered (Decentralized) Wastewater Treatment Systems

AGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is making available the final *Voluntary National Guidelines for Management of Onsite and Clustered (Decentralized) Wastewater Treatment Systems* (referred to here as the Management Guidelines). The purpose of the Management Guidelines is to improve the level of performance of decentralized wastewater treatment systems nationally through improved management programs. The Management Guidelines will help improve system performance by raising the quality of management programs, establishing minimum levels of activity, and institutionalizing the concept of management. Implementation of the Management Guidelines will also provide a greater range of options for cost-effectively meeting wastewater treatment needs and meeting water quality and public health goals. The primary audience for the Management Guidelines are state, tribal and local regulators and community officials that are responsible for regulating onsite and clustered systems.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Any questions regarding the content of the

Voluntary National Guidelines for Management of Onsite and Clustered (Decentralized) Wastewater Treatment Systems can be addressed to Joyce Hudson by e-mail at hudson.joyce@epa.gov or via U.S. mail to Joyce Hudson, U.S. EPA, Office of Wastewater Management (4204M), 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20460.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Decentralized wastewater treatment systems (commonly referred to as septic systems, private sewage systems, individual sewage systems, onsite sewage disposal systems or package plants) include onsite and clustered systems used to collect, treat, and disperse or reclaim wastewater from individual dwellings, businesses, or small communities and service areas. State agencies report that some of these systems have failed because of inappropriate siting or design or inadequate long-term maintenance. Historically high failure rates in some areas indicate a need for better management of these systems to protect public health and water quality. However, when onsite and clustered wastewater treatment systems are properly managed, they may, in many cases, be the most practical and least expensive way to treat household wastewater. In response to the need for improved management programs, EPA has developed the Management Guidelines to establish a benchmark for effective management. The purpose of the Management Guidelines is to raise the level of performance of onsite and clustered wastewater treatment systems through improved management programs. The Management Guidelines will be supplemented with a handbook for state, tribal, and local governments to use in upgrading management programs. The draft *Handbook for Management of Onsite and Clustered (Decentralized) Wastewater Treatment Systems* is being published elsewhere in today's **Federal Register** for public comment.

The Management Guidelines present a set of five model programs based on a comprehensive approach that relies on coordinating the responsibilities and actions among the state, tribal or local regulatory agency, the management entity or service provider and the system owner. The level of management needed increases as the sensitivity of the environment and/or the degree of technological complexity increases. A program's designation increases progressively from Model Program 1 through Model Program 5, reflecting the increased level of management activities