

Frequently Asked Questions about the Wastewater Discharge Elimination (WaDE) Program

Q. What does WaDE stand for?

A. **W**astewater **D**ischarge **E**limination. Some people also refer to it as the "straight pipe program" although the program also includes failing septic systems and unpermitted privies.

Q. WHAT is the history of the WaDE program?

A. The 1990 US Census showed that NC had over 49,000 households without septic systems or sewer. The combined efforts of NC Governor Hunt, the Dept. Of Environment and Natural Resources and members of the Year of the Mountains coalition, as well as other key individuals succeeded in getting NC State Legislators to adopt House Bill 53 of 1995-1996. (Now on record at the end of GS 143-211, Article 21 as an Editor's Note referring to Session Law 1996, Second Extra Session, Chapter 18 Section 27.26)

Q. What is the mission of WaDE as set forth by state legislation?

The legislation directed effort towards three areas of concern.

- (a) the identification and elimination of domestic sewage discharges (both direct [straight pipes] and from overland flow of failing septic systems) into streams proposed to be used or currently used for public water supplies.
- (b) an amnesty period to end December 31, 1997, during which violations of State rules and laws regarding domestic sewage and wastewater discharges identified as a result of this program may be reported and addressed without incurring legal consequences.
- (c) a public education effort regarding the program and the amnesty.

Q. Will the amnesty program, which ended December 31, 1997, be reinstated?

A. No. The WaDE program now follows a self reporting policy drafted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources which is similar to an amnesty program. Home and business owners who report themselves will not have to worry about legal consequences from their illegal wastewater discharges as long as they continue to work towards getting a permit and installing a proper system.

Q. How will the WaDE program work with owners who report themselves while the amnesty is not in effect?

A. Owners of households who report themselves outside of an amnesty period or are found, during surveys, to have violations of State rules or laws regarding domestic sewage or wastewater discharges will be referred to the local Environmental Health Sections of their county health departments or health districts. The local Environmental Health offices will provide an application for an Improvement Permit to the owner's wastewater disposal system. The WaDE program encourages county Environmental Health Sections to waive repair

permit fees. The WaDE program also provides health departments with a list of [funding sources](#) and helps coordinate community wide initiatives to reduce the costs of repairs.

Q. What type of funding is available for repairing or replacing septic systems?

A. Grants (for extra low income households) and low interest loans are available through governmental agencies such as US Department of Agriculture, NC Department. of Commerce and the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Regional councils of government and local community initiatives may also be able to secure [other funding sources](#).

Q. Is my washing machine drain pipe that empties to a shallow ditch at the edge of my yard considered an illegal wastewater discharge?

A. Yes. Under NC sewage rules (15A NCAC 18A .1900 [.1937 (a)]) "any person owning or controlling a residence, place of business, or place of public assembly containing water-using fixtures connected to a water supply source shall discharge **all** wastewater directly to an **approved** wastewater system for that specific use." You may have a separate wastewater treatment and disposal system in your yard for the sink drain and/or washing machine drain but it must be approved and permitted by an authorized Environmental Health Specialist from your local county health department or health district.

Q. Can I fix my straight pipes or failing septic system myself?

A. As long as you first obtain a site evaluation and receive an 'Authorization to Construct' permit from your county's authorized Environmental Health Specialist you may do the installation yourself. You should also be able to demonstrate your ability to understand the technical concepts of the system and have the physical capabilities and proper equipment to carry out the designed system installation. Most people choose to hire an installer by getting at least three bids for the project and selecting the best bid offer. Regardless of whether you install the system yourself or hire someone else to do it for you, the installed system must be inspected by the authorized Environmental Health Specialist before the system can be covered over and put into use.

Q. Are failing septic systems and straight pipes considered to be a big problem in North Carolina?

A. Yes. US 1990 census data shows that nearly 50,000 households in NC had neither public sewer or individual septic systems. A current door to door survey in a western NC county is projecting 2138 households with straight pipes and failing septic systems identified as compared with 561 identified with 1990 census data for that county. Projections of this current survey vs. census data indicate that there could be as many as 200,000 households with straight pipes and failing septic systems in North Carolina. 200,000 households generating a conservative estimate of 100 gallons of wastewater per day for an average household would mean 2,000,000 gallons of wastewater discharging into streams and onto land across the state each day.

Q. What is the problem with wastewater going into our streams?

A. Wastewater containing human feces may contain disease causing bacteria and viruses harmful to other humans. Large scale epidemics of typhoid fever, cholera and dysentery used to kill thousands of people in populated centers until the link was made between wastewater carrying diseases and drinking water or waters where raw fish and shellfish were consumed. Wastewater generated in our households contain nutrients that nourish algae in our streams, rivers and lakes. The algae grows so well and so fast that they use up almost all the oxygen in the water and produce high levels of toxins which then causes fish and other aquatic animals to die in mass.

Q. How can I get more information about straight pipes, failing septic systems and initiatives of the WaDE Program?

A. You may call 1-800-9-SEWAGE (1-800-973-9243) in Raleigh for more information.