Revision process for the Technical Standards for Subsurface Sewage Disposal Systems

Public Health Code (PHC) regulations that became effective in August of 1982 provide clear language that allows the Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish "Technical Standards for Subsurface Sewage Disposal Systems" (Technical Standards). Specifically, PHC Section 19-13-B103d (b) stipulates that subsurface sewage disposal systems (a.k.a., septic systems) within the scope of the regulation shall be designed, installed and operated in accordance with the Technical Standards that are published by DPH. The scope of the regulation as stipulated in PHC Sec. 19-13-B103a governs residential and small commercial subsurface sewage disposal systems with a capacity of 5,000 gallons per day or less. These systems represent more than 95% of all on-site sewage disposal systems in Connecticut, and they serve approximately 30% of the state's population. The PHC regulations stipulate that DPH shall review the Technical Standards annually and make changes available on January 1st of each year. The Technical Standards were first published in 1982, and revisions have been made to them nine times, most recently on January 1, 2009.

Prior to the publication of the original Technical Standards, the DPH convened a Code Advisory Committee (CAC) to assist in establishing the Technical Standards, and to ensure that there is a mechanism to solicit input from the various stakeholder organizations in future revisions. The first meeting of the CAC occurred in 1980 and CAC meetings have been held since to provide a forum for discussion of Technical Standards' revisions. In addition to DPH, the following organizations are represented on the CAC:

- CT Department of Environmental Protection
- CT Home Builders Association
- CT Environmental Health Association
- CT Association of Directors of Health
- CT Engineering Associations
- CT On-site Wastewater Recycling Association
- CT Soil Scientists

DPH also solicits feedback from other organizations and industries when proposed sewage disposal regulations or Technical Standards modifications may impact them. The DPH has worked with organizations and companies representing or involving Proprietary Leaching Systems, Concrete Pre-casters, Plastic Septic Tanks, Pump & Pipe Suppliers, WPCAs, Home Inspectors, Building Officials, Realtors, Family Campgrounds, Zoning Officials, Environmentalists and Town Clerks, among others.

The Technical Standards, which is a 50-page publication, is available on the following DPH web site: www.ct.gov/dph/subsurfacesewage. CAC meeting notices and meeting agendas are also posted in advance on this web site. CAC members can request items/issues be placed on the agenda. CAC meeting notes are made available, and proposed Technical Standards' revisions are posted on the above website. Typically, the CAC is convened 10 months in advance of the January 1st proposed revision date, and at least 3 to 4 meetings are held to solicit feedback and comments from the stakeholder organizations. Comments and suggestions on revisions to the Technical Standards can be provided to DPH from any interested party.

When the PHC regulations were passed to allow for DPH to establish Technical Standards, it was recognized that a streamlined and efficient process was needed to allow state of the art technology and science to be incorporated into on-site sewage disposal codes. The PHC regulations associated with the Technical Standards provide the administrative framework for the approval and permitting of sewage disposal systems. The regulations establish minimum suitability criterion for new construction, and define areas of concerns that require additional design considerations. The Technical Standards provide a mechanism for DPH to approve stone aggregate, select fill, leaching systems, piping, septic tanks, effluent filters and filter fabric. It is noted that many new proprietary leaching systems were first approved in Connecticut, mainly because of the Technical Standards revision process. There are currently a dozen or so Connecticut companies that have approved products listed in the Technical Standards.