

## **In Favor with Amendments of HB831 – Environment - Septic Systems - Online Database**

To Environment and Transportation Committee Members,

My name is Eddie Harrison, I am the legislative liaison representing MOWPA (Maryland Onsite Wastewater Professionals Association).

The Amendments that MOWPA would like to add to HB831 is for Design plans and criteria, and as-built drawings to be included in the list of items within the database.

We also feel that this bill will not have any chance of moving forward without Capital investment from the State of Maryland.

### **HB831, as written, has little to no positive affect on the Onsite Wastewater Industry.**

Onsite Wastewater System records are vital to have access to, by the property owners and many professionals that may associate themselves with a property:

**The property owner** – to know where their system is to be able to protect it from vehicle damage, utility interference (Communication lines, Electric lines, water lines, and other underground utilities). It helps the property owner plan for construction projects (Additions, pools, sheds, driveways, etc.). If property owners could have access to acquire their design plans/records from the convenience of their home, as they do for their SDAT and Deed information, it could avoid unintended damage to their Onsite System and they could make more informed plans for construction. Currently, the property owner finds out where their Onsite System is located after they damage the system or have hired a contractor, paid an architect to design their project, apply for the permit, and then be told by the local Health Department that they can't proceed.

**MHIC contractors, pool contractors, shed retailers, fence contractors, etc.** - could have access to the design plans for review BEFORE they start the planning. It can help to identify where structures and utilities can be placed and can't be placed. It would save the contractors and the property owners a lot of time and expense.

**Property Transfer Inspectors** – are required by MDE to obtain Onsite Wastewater records to include with their inspection report. This is to give the new owners a clear perspective of where the system is, and any history of issues the property might have. If there has been any repairs and if the property has any capacity restrictions and many other valuable information. Acquiring these records directly from the County Health Department, today, is hit or miss, depending on the County. Some Counties inform us they have 30 days to provide these records (according to PIA guidelines)

**Onsite Wastewater Pumpers and Installers** – can access these design records to find the tank to pump it (If the tank has been buried or hidden) and an Installer can locate the components for a repair without digging all over the yard. (I, personally, have dug 4 or 5 holes all over the front yard, only to find out the system was in the back yard.)

An **Onsite Wastewater Service Provider** – which is primarily what my company does, we work on the Automated Onsite Wastewater Systems, including the BAT (Best Available Technology) systems. We also maintain and service mound systems, drip dispersal systems, peat filtration systems and any other Onsite Wastewater System that utilizes electricity and moving parts.

My typical scenario is, I will get a call from a customer that their alarm is going off or they have a backup into their home. I go out to the property and discover one of these automated dispersal systems, like a drip dispersal system. These drip systems are only in the ground about 6" and have access points at grade level and small diameter green boxes. The system will be anywhere from 10 to 20 years old and the grass has grown over these access points and we can't find them right off. Sometime we get lucky and can find them in an hour or two, but many times it takes hours. We don't know how many there are. We can guess from experience, the age of the system and the brand, but those are not dependable. I have spent 2 days poking and digging all over a customer's lawn to try and find these components. Luckily for me, none have eluded my tenacity. Not all professionals have the experience I have (and luck). All of this poking around is costing the customer.

Another common scenario is on a mound system or Low Pressure Dosing (LPD) system where each system is custom designed for each property. Based on the size of the absorption area, absorption rate of the soil, and the elevation difference, each system will have a specific brand and size of pump. And each system will have different pressures (known as "Head Pressure") which we measure from observation ports and the end of each lateral. On some of these older systems, the pump they utilized is no longer available, or has been deemed unreliable. Sometimes, especially in the early times of installing these types of systems, the installer would install the wrong size pump. For all of these reasons I, as a service provider, need the design drawings and design criteria to perform repairs to match what the system was designed to do.

Property owners almost never have these records in their possession. These types of records are not important to property owners until the system obtains some age on it, and starts to have component malfunctions. After 10, 15, 20 years, the property owner can't remember where they are, the property has changed hands, or they threw them away, because "If you don't use something in 5 years, you probably don't need it".

One issue my company has had to deal with in the past few years is incomplete information. Some Counties have taken the initiative to develop their own digital database. While this has improved the time it takes to acquire the information, the information that I require will be missing. Sometimes I can request a deeper dive into the records, and they will produce them. But, in some instances they are not produced. I believe, In some office settings, preserving these vital records are not deemed a priority. These systems, that I refer to, cost anywhere from \$20K to \$50K when they were installed. In most cases, these systems are the last hope for an Onsite Wastewater System for the property. The next step would be a "Pump and Haul" scenario, where all wastewater produce on the property would have to be hauled away in a truck. When this is the case, the property value is essentially cut in half. I think these property owners deserve better service than this from their government.

**Designers** – if a current system fails and a designer would need to know what was already there to be able to design the new system and avoid the old one. Or, maybe, he might want to design something a little better.

**Not to mention all of the benefits to the local Health Departments** – Not only for them to be able to lookup records quickly for in-house use, but it will save them time and resources to serve the public. Many Health Departments get 50 to 80 requests for records a day, from Property Transfer Inspectors, property owners, and service providers. Most Health Departments have one person that is exclusively dedicated to producing these records. With an online database the resources for this position could be utilized elsewhere.

We need to bring Septic records up to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and have modern access to vital property records as we do with SDAT, Deeds, and every other important public information.

The environmentalists, also, have their own important reasons for moving this forward. I support their motives, but I am not speaking for them.

This concept has been floating around MOWPA for 10 years. “Team Septic” has been trying to find a way to get this initiative to move forward for the last 5 years. We all understand that this is a hard mountain to climb. But kicking it down the road only makes it harder.

“Team Septic” had a Zoom meeting with a contractor that does just this. He specializes in online databases for Onsite Wastewater. He sells programs to private contractors to keep track of their services records and has built statewide databases for 6 States, including Florida. He claims he can set up the hardware for work stations in each County and digitize all of the records for \$1.50 per property. Maryland has 420,000 Onsite Wastewater Systems in the State. That would be \$630,000. He was a salesman, so, in my opinion, I would think \$1.5M could do it, if MDE would let a private contractor, with experience, do it.

This topic has been discussed many times in MOWPA Board meetings and MOWPA events, with advocates and naysayers. All will agree that it is needed, and would make our industry so much more efficient, but the naysayer balk at the work involved to get it started. “You can’t eat an elephant all in one sitting, you have to eat him one bite at a time” But he will never be eaten if you just stare at him and say “He’s too big”.

One major hurdle is all of the local Health Departments have stored their own records in their own way. All of them have their own twist on their filing systems. This will be a huge endeavor, but it needs to be done for the public good and to help preserve property values. The cost savings down the road will outweigh the investment cost today. There will be savings in manpower to the public employed and savings in costs to the consumer.

“The Onsite Wastewater Disposal System is the most expensive appliance in the home!”

**I represent MOWPA** as an un-compensated Legislative Liaison, current Vice-President, and former Board President.

My day job is the owner of BAT Onsite, LLC. BAT Onsite, LLC., which is primarily an Operation and Maintenance Provider for automated Onsite Wastewater Systems. Including, but not limited to: Advanced Treatment Units (including BAT), Pump Systems, Mound Systems, Drip Dispersal Systems, and pretty much any Onsite Wastewater System that requires electrical/mechanical operation under 5,000 gallons per day. I am currently servicing over 600 units, covering the whole State of Maryland. I have been

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working in the Onsite Wastewater Industry as an installer, pumper, designer, property transfer inspector, and operation and maintenance provider since 1984

**MOWPA represents** all Maryland professionals in the Onsite Industry. We have in our membership: Installers, Pumpers, Engineers, Property Transfer Inspectors, Operation and Maintenance Providers, and Code Officials.

[The Maryland Onsite Wastewater Professionals Association (MOWPA) is a 501 C(6) not-for-profit organization, chartered in September 2004 to provide education and training programs for individuals and companies working in the onsite sewage disposal system industry.

*OUR MISSION....to promote and enhance the use of onsite wastewater treatment and disposal by providing a forum for education, development and information transfer in order to create viable treatment processes, design, construction, operation and maintenance capabilities within the onsite industry. [www.mowpa.org](http://www.mowpa.org)*

The Onsite Wastewater System (Septic System) is the most expensive appliance in the home.

I ask for **favorable** report with **Amendments of HB831 – Environment - Septic Systems - Online Database**

Thank you for your time,

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