

ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

# AOWA news

Better Living Through Improved Sanitation

Vol. 26 No. 3 Summer 2020



[www.aowainfo.org](http://www.aowainfo.org)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Don't Waste Time - Get on the Frontlines!

The Honorable Brent Bradshaw

A Tale of Two Onsite System Inspections

and more.

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[www.aowainfo.org](http://www.aowainfo.org)

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The appearance of products in advertising or the editorial content of this newsletter does not imply endorsement by AOWA.

*On the cover: Ronda McMichael, a member of the AOWA board, is featured in the article, "Don't Waste Time - Get on the Frontlines!" beginning on page 6.*

## From the AOWA President



I'm sure you can tell by the heat and humidity in the air that summer is officially among us. I hope you all are doing well and staying safe during these unprecedented times. Please rest assure the AOWA is here for you as we maneuver through this new normal.

The AOWA would like to take a moment to honor Mr. Brent Bradshaw for his service to both the AOWA and AOWB boards. Brent recently passed away after a long fight from a Jet Ski accident. Brent was an incredible husband, father and friend. He will certainly be missed by all in the industry. Thank you, Brent, for your years of service and dedication to the wastewater industry.

If you attended the trade show back in March, thank you! We hope that those of you who attended the show as a non-member were able to see the benefit of membership with the AOWA. And we hope you will consider joining! For those of you who need to renew your membership, please do so. Don't miss out on our member benefits! A membership form can be found within this issue and on the AOWA website.

Helping Hands Across Alabama continues its efforts to assist those in need of septic installations and repairs. Anyone who would like to volunteer for an upcoming Helping Hands project, and are NOT currently an AOWA member, will receive a complimentary membership for one year. You would be responsible for renewing the membership once the first initial year is up. To volunteer your time and receive this complimentary membership, please contact Abby Ashley at the AOWA office. We look forward to working with you and appreciate your time and commitment to this worthwhile project!

*Alan Astin*  
AOWA President



We are excited to announce updates to the AOWA's education program. Though the COVID-19 pandemic has set us

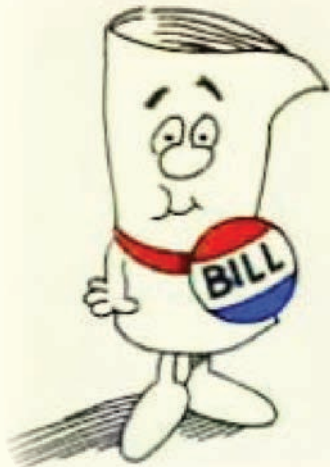
back, we are looking forward to providing you with an enhanced education program that will feature field and lab exercises, in addition to classroom learning. The AOWA is excited to partner with the Homebuilders Association of Alabama (HBAA), the North Alabama Homebuilding Academy (NAHA), and In The Works. The goal in making this transition is to take technical information from the classroom and transfer it to a field setting. A part of the new education program is Schoology, an online preparatory tool for in-person licensing classes. This program will be managed by NAHA, with the assistance of the staff at ASG (AOWA's management company). Within this issue you will find updated registration forms for both the continuing education and licensing classes. You can register for these classes online or by calling the AOWA office. Please note the Basic Installer classes are currently full, so please call the AOWA office to be placed on a waiting list.

We know these are trying times and we need to lean on each other now more than ever. Please know the AOWA is here for YOU! Our goal is to provide the best resources and utmost support to our members and other industry professionals.

As always, thank you for your efforts in keeping the AOWA a successful, supportive association for its members and others in the Onsite Wastewater Industry.

Take Care, Alan





## We want to keep you informed!

Please visit the AOWA website for updates on legislative bills and activities that affect our industry.

[www.aowainfo.org](http://www.aowainfo.org)

## We Want You to Hear from Us!

### UPDATING YOUR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION IS IMPORTANT

The Alabama Onsite Wastewater Association is on a mission to update all of our members contact information. In the day and age of computers and phones being the primary mode of communication, we are striving to collect all of our members email addresses so you can be included in our most up to date AOWA communications. Below is an AOWA Member information update form. Please be sure to fill it out in its entirety with your mailing and email address and send back to the AOWA office (P.O. Box 10, Lanett, AL 36863).

If you should have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out to Abby Burns-Ashley, AOWA Membership Coordinator at [aburns@asginfo.net](mailto:aburns@asginfo.net) or call us at (334) 396-3434.



## UPDATE YOUR AOWA MEMBERSHIP CONTACT INFORMATION TODAY!



Please fill out the membership information update form below and mail back in the pre addressed envelope.

COMPANY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

AOWB LICENSE # (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

HOME COUNTY OF BUSINESS: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

OFFICE PHONE #: \_\_\_\_\_ MOBILE PHONE #: \_\_\_\_\_

NATURE OF BUSINESS:    *Install/Repair*                  *Pump*                  *Portable Restrooms*                  *Manufacture Tanks*

## Don't Waste Time – Get on the Frontlines!

A look at one of Alabama's successful female leaders in the waste industry

By: Jenna Brown



### **RONDA MCMICHAEL**

*President, Wise Environmental Solutions, Inc.*

*Owner & CEO, dba Anne's Cans  
At Large - Portable Restrooms  
AOWA Board of Directors*

Ronda McMichael is using her 30+ years of knowledge and experience to pave the way for others in the waste industry. A lifelong resident of Anniston, Ala., Ronda grew up as the only girl in a family of boys. On any given day you could find her playing baseball, basketball or football with the neighborhood kids, who were all boys as well. Being picked last for the team didn't deter Ronda; however. She continued to develop her skills and kept showing up, which finally earned her a spot on the team. This mindset is something she has carried with her throughout her career. While in high school, Ronda was involved in student government, marching band, and was a reporter for the school newspaper. After high school, she attended Jacksonville State University and the University of West Georgia. "This was my schooling, not my education," Ronda said. "I have never stopped learning and am blessed to learn something new every day." Fast-forward to present day, Ronda is the President of Wise Environmental Solutions, Inc., and owner and CEO of dba Anne's Cans.



**WISE ENVIRONMENTAL**

*Anne's Cans*

When Ronda isn't holding down her two businesses, she is serving other industry professionals as the At Large representative for Portable Restrooms on the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Association (AOWA) board. Ronda has served on the AOWA board for six years, this term being her first as the agent for Portable Restrooms. She is currently the only female on the board and is proud to be a part of an organization that is inclusive. "It is truly an honor and privilege to represent the AOWA," Ronda said. "The people in our industry are the salt of the earth and the backbone of America. They represent strong ethical values and the dream of entrepreneurship at the grass roots level." Ronda also serves on the Portable Sanitation Association International (PSAI) board and hopes that by serving on each of these boards, she will gain the knowledge to help the state of Alabama create a new outlook on how critical and essential the portable sanitation service is to public health.

Ronda credits her late husband, Forney McMichael, for the opportunity he afforded her in this industry. She notes there have been various challenges and obstacles she has had to overcome during her 30 years in the industry. Ronda has worked in nearly every state in the southeast, through disaster relief services or a physical presence in the area. "Having the knowledge of different regulations and training in different states

continued...

has been beneficial toward our company growth," Ronda noted. "It has also helped me better serve the AOWA board with the knowledge I have gained."



Founded in 2010, Wise Environmental Solutions, Inc. is a leader in the enhanced waste collection and resource recovery services industry in Oxford, Birmingham, and Jefferson County, Ala. The company has been servicing Calhoun, Talladega, Etowah, Jefferson, and St. Clair counties for over 25 years, with the goal of delivering superior customer service and innovative solutions, while protecting human and natural resources. Wise Environmental is a certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBENC) and has been pegged as one of the best Women-Owned Small Businesses in Alabama.

Since its founding, Wise Environmental has purchased several smaller companies, including Mac's Vacs and Yellow Hammer Roll Offs, to expand the ability of the company and to handle portable sanitation on a larger scale.

Anne's Cans has been servicing the entire southeastern United States for over 40 years, providing portable restrooms, VIP restroom trailers and septic services. It has provided sanitation services for 300,000 race fans at Talladega Super Speedway, Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival, and the 1996 Olympic games held in Atlanta. Ronda purchased Anne's Cans in 2010, the same year she founded Wise Environmental Solutions, Inc.

Ronda feels fortunate to have the stability that the waste industry provides, noting it is an essential service, even in times of economic hardship. In the next five to ten years, she hopes to hand this responsibility over to her children, while providing supportive guidance from a remote undisclosed location.

When asked what advice she would give to those entering the industry, Ronda provided a cheat sheet. First, there is no such thing as a "No"; it only

*...there is no such thing as a "No"; it only means "find a better way".*



continued...



*Ronda McMichael, center, at an AOWA business meeting.*

means “find a better way”. She lists some games one should be familiar with when going into business.

**1. Poker.** You have to be willing to take a chance, even if you don’t have all the cards yet.

**2. Chess.** You have to be able to create a successful strategy in order to overcome your obstacles.

**3. A little magic here and there.** There are times you have to be able to think on your feet. Even though you feel you have all the tools you need, you should be prepared for life to throw some unexpected challenges along the way.

In addition to being a leader in the waste industry, Ronda is also a Zig Ziglar Legacy certified speaker. After being thrown reluctantly into a leadership role, Ronda realized she needed some help enhancing her communication skills. Communication doesn’t seem to be a problem for Ronda now. In fact, she thinks she may talk a little too much. Anyway, we’ll see if she can put her words onto paper as she is in the process of writing a book.



Ronda encourages those that are not members to consider joining the AOWA. “There is power in numbers,” Ronda exclaimed. “When you have unity and focus in a group moving toward a goal you get more accomplished. Our industry must continue to stand together in order to protect the owners and operators from litigation. We must also continue educating and providing recommendations to the state, county and local authorities to overcome the challenges that our industry faces. The AOWA is making strides on a daily basis to improve education and create a stronger voice for its members.”

The truth is, whether you are male or female, an industry veteran or just beginning, you are in charge of setting your own goals and finding your own way to reach them. Ronda has been thrown some curveballs along the way, but she has accepted them head on with the goal of being a successful mother, businesswoman and industry professional; all of which she has clearly accomplished.







Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.  
STATE HEALTH OFFICER

During these trying times, I'm sure at least one of you has been affected by Covid-19 personally or known someone. The Alabama Department of Public Health has published guidelines for safeguarding all businesses.

Coronaviruses are susceptible to the same disinfection conditions in the healthcare setting as other viruses, so current disinfection conditions in wastewater treatment facilities are expected to be sufficient. This includes conditions for practices such as oxidation with hypochlorite (i.e., chlorine bleach) and peracetic acid, as well as inactivation through the use of ultraviolet irradiation.

OSHA suggests there is no evidence to suggest that additional, COVID-19-specific protections are needed for employees involved in wastewater management operations, including those at wastewater treatment facilities. Wastewater treatment plant operations should ensure workers follow routine practices to prevent exposure to wastewater, including using the engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE normally required for work tasks when handling untreated wastewater.

The CDC provides additional information about wastewater management and Covid 19 Control and Prevention.

If you have questions regarding Covid-19, please visit our website  
<https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/>

Stay Safe,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leigh S. Willis".

Leigh S. Willis, Director  
Community Environmental Protection

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PHYSICAL ADDRESS The RSA Tower | 201 Monroe Street | Montgomery, AL 36104

[alabamapublichealth.gov](http://alabamapublichealth.gov)



# AOWA Member Benefits



As a member of the AOWA you receive many benefits including:

- Industry communications from our **quarterly AOWA News Magazine** that includes the latest information on industry services, technology and activities.
- Registration discounts for **AOWA's Licensing Courses** and the **Annual Trade Show and Continuing Education Conference**. The 2021 Trade Show will take place March 18-19 at Lakepoint State Park in Eufaula, Alabama.
- AOWA members have daily **Representation during the Alabama Legislative Session** to monitor legislation that may or may not be favorable to our industry.
- **Your voice will be heard in AOWA elections**. Under the new bylaws District Directors are elected by the members in that District. We encourage you to get involved and offer to be a Director or serve on an AOWA committee.
- AOWA members also support those in need through the **Disaster Victims Assistance Program** and **Helping Hands Across Alabama** projects. In 2019, AOWA supported tornado victims in Lee County with over \$55,000 in contributed services and over \$10,000 in donated funds for supplies.

## Save the Date 2021 Trade Show

**Thursday, March 18 – Friday, March 19**  
**Lakepoint State Park**  
**Eufaula, AL**



# The Honorable Brent Bradshaw

Mountain of a Man

Joyful

Bear Hugs

AOWB Chairman

An Unforgettable Laugh

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Love of the Outdoors

AOWA Board

"I enjoyed working with Brent on both the AOWB and AOWA boards. He was always bigger than life both in height and bearing. In our side discussions a story of joy regarding his daughter was normal. Brent loved the Onsite Wastewater Industry and valued his time to give back to his fellow workers as well as our customers. He is missed."

- Randy Anderson, AOWA Board Member

"Brent was a big guy with a big heart. He was a hard-working businessman, who loved his family. He was a great asset to the AOWA and AOWB. Brent will be greatly missed."

- Marc Geiger, AOWA Board Member



Funeral Procession, Elms of Coosada



2020 AOWA Trade Show  
Marc Geiger (Left) accepting an award from  
Brent Bradshaw (Right)



2019 AOWA Trade Show  
From Left: Derrick Hutchins, Brent Bradshaw,  
Randy Anderson

# A Tale of Two Onsite System Inspections

By: Jim Anderson, Pumper Magazine, June 2020

***Following correct step-by-step processes is the key to ensuring successful inspections for both gravity and pump systems.***

In past columns, I have discussed the need for and the use of standard inspection methods for various levels of inspection. Levels or types of inspections include a cursory visual inspection, operating inspection, code compliance inspection and a warranty or guarantee inspection. These types of inspections can overlap or be part of additional activities, such as troubleshooting problems, or can stand on their own to meet some type of requirement, such as inspections for real estate transfer.

It continues to be important that all parties to the inspection understand the purpose and standards followed for the inspection performed so that results are not misinterpreted by the homeowner, buyer or permitting authority. I have long been a proponent of operating-level inspections for real estate transfer and inspections to determine maintenance needs and schedules.

## **CURRENT CONDITIONS**

Simply stated, an operation-level inspection is based on the current condition of the system and reflects whether system components are in good condition and working the way they should. I ask the question: Is each component well maintained and working as it should to move water from one part of the system to the next?

For a gravity system, the operation-level inspection needs to determine if wastewater is moving from the house to the septic tank. Are all house water sources connected to the system or are there some delivered elsewhere? Is the septic tank

structurally sound and watertight? Is it operating at the proper level and delivering effluent to the distribution boxes or dropboxes? And then is water from the distribution boxes or dropboxes moving to the treatment trenches or bed?

These conditions can be determined by opening all the components and running or introducing water to the system. Investigating water sources in the house and turning them on while observing whether the water reaches the tank can be done with or without the use of dye. Similarly, opening the tank and distribution boxes as water is moving through the system will demonstrate if they are operating as they should or if there are any backups, slowdowns or backyard surfacing.



A list of items to be evaluated for each of the components is followed to make sure that not only is the water moving through the system, but each of the components is also in operating condition. For example, septic tank baffles are present and not deteriorated, piping enters and leaves the tank at the proper level and the distribution boxes are not deteriorated.

continued...

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### A MORE COMPLEX SYSTEM

Many systems today have additional components that involve pump tanks or chambers, pumps and the associated controls to ensure the proper amount of effluent is delivered when the pump is turned on. With pumps in the system, the operation inspection becomes more complicated.

First, determine if the pump is operating on demand or with a timer. On demand means the pump turns on and delivers a predetermined dose to the system. With a timer, the pump only operates for a set amount of time at set time periods.

For on demand, the pump will turn on every time the amount of water for a single dose is delivered. Typically, the amount of the dose is set at about one-fourth the estimated daily flow. The disadvantage of this approach is that water is not used equally throughout the day. So, in the morning and evening, more than one dose could be delivered to the soil treatment part of the system in a short time, putting unnecessary stress on the soil treatment unit.

Using a timer spreads delivery of the water to soil treatment unit system more evenly during the day. This may require a larger pump tank because water needs to be stored in the tank until the timer allows the pump to run. In recent years, there has been increased use of advanced pretreatment components using timers to deliver effluent to the next component or soil treatment unit. This makes the inspection process more complicated.

In an on-demand system, determining whether the pump is operating can rely on an evaluation of electrical connections and the presence of floats, including an alarm float. By lifting the floats, pump

operation can be observed. Does water move out of the tank to the soil treatment unit? Similarly, you can evaluate whether the alarm triggers by lifting the alarm float. The pump chamber or tank should be evaluated, as with the septic tank, to make sure it is structurally sound, all openings are watertight and all electrical connections are waterproof with connections made outside the tank.

### CHECK WITH SERVICE PROVIDER

Unless the inspector of a timer system is also the service provider, the inspector may not have access to the timer settings for the system. And as with any system, running water through the system must be done with care to avoid causing damage. The inspector should contact the service provider for information on when the system was serviced, repairs completed, etc., to determine if the system is operating as it should. The tank and electrical connections should be evaluated for any potential problems.

As systems become more complicated, the protocols and methods of inspection need to change. Standards will need to be changed and upgraded to reflect how each new component can be evaluated.



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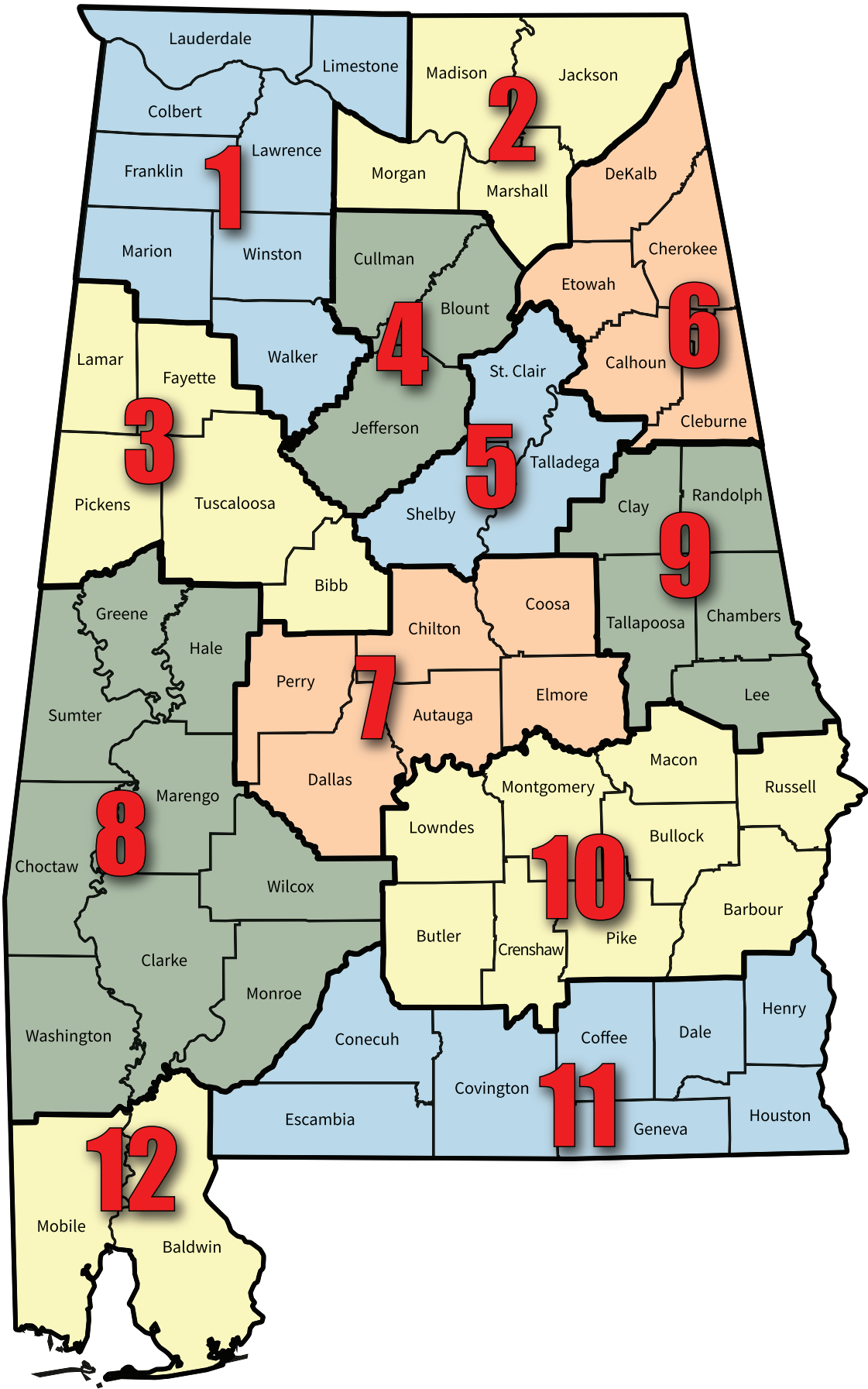
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# AOWA District Map

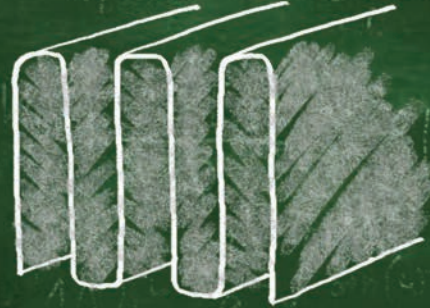




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# REGISTER NOW FOR CLASSES OFFERED

*(forms on pages 19 and 20)*

## Continuing Education Classes

September 10 - 11 - Pelham Civic Complex - Pelham, AL

October 29 - 30 - Jon Archer Agriculture Center - Mobile, AL

November 19 - 20 - Joe Wheeler State Park - Rogersville, AL

## 2020 Licensing Classes

### Basic Installer

**\*All Basic Installer class are FULL.**

**Please call the AOWA office to be placed on a waiting list.**

July 28 - 31 - Huntsville, AL	Test Date: August 3 (Monday)	Full
August 10 - 13 - Montgomery, AL	Test Date: August 14 (Friday)	Full
August 24 - 27 - Montgomery, AL	Test Date: August 28 (Friday)	Full
November 10 - 13 - Huntsville, AL	Test Date: November 11 (Monday)	Full

### Advanced Installer, Level I

October 6 - 9 - Huntsville, AL      Test Date: October 12 (Monday)

### Advanced Installer, Level II

July 20 - 23 - Montgomery, AL      Test Date: July 24 (Friday)

December 1 - 4 - Huntsville, AL      Test Date: December 7 (Monday)

### Pumper

September 1 - 2 - Huntsville, AL      Test Date: September 4 (Friday)



# THE ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

## CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES 2020 REGISTRATION FORM

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

COMPANY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

### INDICATE WHICH CLASS YOU WANT BY MARKING THE BOX

- September 10 - 11 - Pelham Civic Complex - Pelham, AL
- October 29 - 30 - Jon Archer Ag Center - Mobile, AL
- November 19 - 20 - Joe Wheeler State Park - Rogersville, AL

**Note:** Only one licensee per member company is entitled to the \$50 discount. Other licensees at the member company must pay full price.

*\*Eight hours of Continuing Education will be offered on Thursday. Six hours will be offered on Friday.*

#### REGISTRATION FEES:

Registration includes training material and attendance certification.

Mail Form and Registration Fee (see chart to the right) to:

AOWA Training Program  
P.O. Box 10  
Lanett, AL 36863

Make check or money order payable to "AOWA".  
There will be no refunds and no transfers.  
There will be a \$30.00 fee for all returned checks. No exceptions!  
Registration deadlines for the classes are always 2 weeks prior to class.  
*Please note: You are not registered until we receive your registration form and payment.*

BASIC INST./PUMPER/MAN (6 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$220.00 \$170.00
ADVANCED INST. LEVEL 1 (8 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$265.00 \$215.00
Advanced Inst. Level 2 (10 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$320.00 \$270.00
Portable Restroom Only (4 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$160.00 \$110.00



# THE ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

## LICENSING COURSES 2020 REGISTRATION FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### INDICATE WHICH CLASS YOU WANT BY MARKING IN DATE BOX:

Basic Installer Licensing     July 28 - 31     August 10 - 13     August 24 - 27     November 10 - 13  
*(The Basic Installer class is limited to the first 15 registered attendees) (ALL CLASSES ARE FULL - CONTACT RHONDA AT THE AOWA TO BE ADDED TO A WAIT LIST)*

Pumper Licensing Classes     September 1 - 2

Advanced Installer Level I Class     Late August/ Early September (TBD)     October 6 - 9

Advanced Installer Level II Class     July 20 - 23     December 1 - 4

Manufacturing Class (Please call 334-396-3434)

**REGISTRATION FEES:**  
Registration includes training material and attendance certification.  
Mail Form and Registration Fee (see chart to the right) to:  
  
AOWA Training Program  
P.O. Box 10  
Lanett, AL 36863

BASIC INSTALLER CLASS	\$425.00
PUMPER LICENSING CLASS	\$300.00
MANUFACTURER LICENSING CLASS	\$300.00
*ADVANCED INSTALLER CLASS LEVEL I (Four Day Class and price includes text book) (AOWA MEMBERS)	\$500.00 \$425.00
ADVANCED INSTALLER LEVEL II CLASS (AOWA MEMBERS)	\$375.00 \$300.00

- Make check or money order payable to "AOWA".
- There will be no refunds and no transfers.
- There will be a fee of \$30 for all returned checks.
- Registration deadlines for the classes are always 2 weeks before the scheduled date of any class.
- You are not registered for any class until your payment is received by the AOWA Office.

**IMPORTANT!!!** In addition to the training class fee, you will be required to pay a separate examination fee to the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board (AOWB)  
Mail to: AOWB, P.O. Box 303552, Montgomery, AL 36104  
*You will also be required to show a photo identification card when you take the test.*

# News from the AOWB



## THE AOWB REMINDS US OF WHAT A GOOD PUMPER IS...



It is with a sad heavy heart that the AOWB share this information with you. The Chairman of the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board, good friend to many, and fellow industry professional, The Honorable Brent Bradshaw (BSKC Soil and Septic) passed away on June 1, 2020. Governor Kay Ivey appointed Mr. Bradshaw to the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board in September 2018 to represent the pumpers of the State of Alabama. Honesty and integrity are priority in the Governor's administration, and Mr. Bradshaw embodied these two virtues while serving in this position. Please keep the Bradshaw family in your prayers.

### The Good Pumper

What is a good pumper? Each of you holding a pumper's license have your own definition of what a good pumper is. I would like to take this opportunity to give you the Executive Director's definition of a good pumper. First, a pumper is defined as any individual who is licensed by the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board for pumping; servicing; replacing lids, risers, tees or filters of septic tanks, sewage tanks, grease traps and portable toilets. This does not include pumps associated with septic tanks, sewage tanks and grease traps.

Does a good pumper pump only one side of the septic

tank? Does a good pumper use pumpout ports that violate the integrity of the septic tank? Does a good pumper tell the homeowner both sides shouldn't be pumped because there was no filter on the tank?

No, the good pumper does not. The good pumper arrives at the location and evaluates the situation for the pumping of the tank. If the location of the septic tank is unknown, the pumper looks for a cleanout or areas in the grass with a probe. Once the tank is located, depending on the depth, the pumper uncovers the tank with a shovel or a backhoe, and the pumping of the tank begins. The pumper then effectively and completely pumps the tank by removing the inspection ports at both ends of the tank, or the lids covering both ends of the tank, where the inspection ports are not provided. The pumper is expected to pump all compartments. The pumper shall make the access ports used watertight and note problems or deficiencies in the tank. If problems are not repairs (per the definition of repair) but are maintenance, no repair permit is required. Deficiencies that are causing system failure shall be reported to the local health department and will require a repair permit. If the tank has concrete lids, the pumper will advise the homeowner that risers need to be installed in order to bring the tank up to code. If there is no filter on the tank, the pumper will recommend a filter as well as a maintenance plan to keep the tank pumped every three to five years. The pumper then

covers the tank and dresses the area. The good pumper also ensures his/her technicians are properly trained in all areas of pumping a septic tank. The good pumper also has his/her pump trucks inspected and permitted annually by the local county health department. And finally, the good pumper will maintain and keep good records of his/her log for three years as required by the Alabama Department of Public Health.

The Honorable Brent Bradshaw exemplified what it was to be a Good Pumper. He served on the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board to represent the pumpers in the State of Alabama and to ensure that the pumpers licensed in this state were also good pumpers.

Rest in Peace Chairman. You will be missed by many.



**Melissa Hines**  
*Executive Director*  
Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board

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# AOWA Legislative Recap for the 2020 Regular Session

**By: Stephanie Norrell**

**McMillan & Associates, LLC, a governmental affairs firm representing the AOWA on issues before the Alabama Legislature**

Like many things in 2020 that have been disrupted by the Coronavirus, the legislative session was not immune. Legislators arrived in Montgomery in early February and began addressing issues and taking up legislation. Usually, the more non-controversial issues pass early in the session and then issues that require more debate come later. So when members recessed on March 12 for a two-week spring break, they planned to return March 31 to continue the session.

After an extended break due to the Coronavirus, the House and Senate returned the week of May 4 with the agreement that they would only consider the budgets and non-controversial local bills. This meant a lot of other legislation would die this year.

As members returned to the State House, they had to adhere to social distancing requirements - easier to accomplish in the 35-member Senate than in the 105-member House. In order to follow public health guidelines, the public was not allowed in the State House building. The House of Representative members were spread out during session between the floor of the House, the gallery (where the public normally sits) and overflow rooms. Voting in the House also took considerably longer during this session. Voting this time around required a roll call of members who were not seated on the floor where votes are normally tallied by machine. The Democratic members of the House, with one exception, did not attend the majority of the week in protest over safety and budgetary concerns.

As work got underway it was obvious the Senate had aspirations of getting more than just the budgets and local bills passed. Several bills came out of committee that seemed broader than the agreement. As time progressed, the Speaker finally came out and said he would not agree to moving anything more than the original agreement, so all focus was back to budgets and local legislation.

As the budgets moved along, a new issue arose. The Legislature wanted to make sure they had a say in appropriating federal money coming to Alabama under the CARES Act passed by Congress to assist with Coronavirus-related expenses. The Legislature wanted to limit the amount of money Governor Ivey could spend without their approval. The Governor responded publicly and said "I have never desired to control a single penny of this money and if the Legislature feels so strongly that they should have that authority, I yield to them both the money *and* the responsibility to make good decisions - in the light of day where the people of Alabama know what is happening." The Governor threatened to veto the General Fund budget over this issue.

After she negotiated an agreement with members of the House of Representatives, the Governor announced an executive amendment to the supplemental spending bill for the General Fund that would lay out broad parameters for appropriating the federal money. Several Senators expressed frustration over not being part of the discussions; however, in the end both chambers voted overwhelmingly to approve the proposal. The Governor signed the General Fund and the Education budgets later that day.

The Education budget was less controversial than the General Fund budget. Although reduced from the projected increases earlier in the year that would have allowed for pay increases, it still provides a \$91 million increase over last year's budget and is the largest education budget ever passed. In addition, the bill is to provide \$1.25 billion of bond money for K-12 and higher education to use for capital improvements passed and has been signed into law by the Governor. The Alabama Legislature adjourned the regular session May 18 after approving the Governor's executive amendment on appropriating federal

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Coronavirus funds. Although a Regular Session normally takes up all of the 30 legislative days allotted by the constitution, this year members only met for 21 days due to the public health emergency.

All eyes are now on the question of a special session, and if there might be more than one. Prison reform comes up repeatedly as a potential reason for a special session, especially in light of the threat of a federal takeover of the prison system in the state.

### ISSUES SPECIFIC TO AOWA

Below is a list of bills that passed and a list of those that died this session, which are of interest to the AOWA. The bills that passed include the act number assigned to them at the end of the summary.

### BILLS THAT PASSED THIS SESSION

**SB 25** - Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board Sunset

*Sponsor: Sen. Clyde Chambliss, R - Prattville*

Last summer, after holding hearings and reviewing the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board's audit, the Alabama Legislature's Sunset Committee recommended a three year extension of the Board. So as introduced, SB 25 would have extended the existence of the Board for three years (All Boards and Commissions in the State are subject to sunset review and extension, and most extensions are for four years.) However, after the Alabama Utility Contractors Association testified at the House Boards and Commissions Committee about their complaints with the AOWB, an amendment was adopted to reduce the extension to only one year as a way to encourage the Board to work on this issue with utility contractors and the General Contractors Board. The utility contractors raised concerns about having to be licensed through the AOWB for work they feel they are already licensed to perform through the GC Board, although they drudge up issues from past audits, too, in an attempt to discredit the AOWB. As a result, the AOWB will be subject to another audit and will be brought back before the Sunset Committee later this year for review. The legislation will be

required in the next regular session of the Alabama Legislature to continue their existence. Act #2020-114

**HB 443** - Local CA for Talladega County to Ban Land Application of Human Septage

*Sponsor: Rep. Ron Johnson, R - Sylacauga*

This bill began as HB 243 to ban the application of biosolids, which are a byproduct of wastewater treatment facilities and are regulated by ADEM, in Talladega County. After complaints by many groups that oppose a biosolids ban, the bill was modified and reintroduced as HB 443, which only bans the land application of human septage, defined as "any liquid or materials removed during the pumping of a domestic onsite sewage disposal system". Septage is regulated by the Department of Public Health and land application requires a permit. Since the legislation is a local constitutional amendment, the voters in Talladega County will have the opportunity to vote on this issue in the November general election. If approved, the ban only applies to Talladega County. Act #2020-172

**HB 469** - Local bill for Colbert County regarding Fees for Site Evaluation

*Sponsor: Rep. Andrew Sorrell, R - Muscle Shoals*

This is a local bill, which states that the Colbert County Health Department cannot require a site evaluation test for the repair or replacement of an existing conventional septic tank effluent disposal field. Act #2020-186

### BILLS THAT DIED THIS SESSION

**HB 95** - Increase the AOWB Maximum Fine Amount

*Sponsor: Rep. Kerry Rich, R-Guntersville*

This legislation was drafted by the AOWA to increase the maximum fines allowed by the AOWB in order to put them in line with other similar state regulatory boards. It also removed the requirement to transfer part of the Board's remaining balance at the end of each fiscal year to the state's General Fund. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Kerry Rich of Guntersville. After passing the House 102-0, the bill

continued...



stalled in the Senate as a result of the same issues that were part of the Sunset bill amendment (see above). Because it was one of many bills that had not passed before the Coronavirus preempted the legislative session, the bill died before it could even be considered in the Senate.

**HB 287** – Remove General Fund Transfer Requirement for Certain Boards

*Sponsor: Rep. Howard Sanderford, R-Huntsville*

Under existing law, some occupational licensing boards are required to transfer a portion of their unencumbered funds to the State General Fund at the end of each fiscal year. This bill would remove that requirement for the State Licensing Board for General Contractors, the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board, the Alabama State Board of Respiratory Therapy, and the Alabama Board of Electrical Contractors.

**SB 271** – Local Bill for Shelby Co. regarding Privately Owned Sewer Systems

*Sponsor: Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R – Vestavia Hills*

Under existing law, privately owned sewer systems, with certain exceptions, are regulated by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management with regard to sewage treatment, but are not regulated by the Public Service Commission with regard to rates and consumer protection. This bill proposes a local constitutional amendment for Shelby County to bring certain privately owned sewer systems that use public rights-of-way of public roads under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission under certain conditions.



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# How Can You Inspect a Tank Without Pumping It?

By: Jim Kneiszel, Onsite Installer Magazine, June 2020

A year ago, I wrote with a sense of optimism about a forward-thinking onsite system inspection program started in a recreational lakes region north of Toronto. Homeowners in the municipality of Dysart et al, seemed uncharacteristically supportive of a program to comprehensively inventory and inspect their systems to protect the local environment.

Many retirees and summer cottagers enjoyed the pristine quality of the waterways that have not seen the issue of blue-green algae prevalent in some parts of the U.S., for example. Heading into the second year of these required inspections, Mike Rahme of HomePro Inspections was proud of the level of concern folks were showing about their onsite systems.

"There's a big emphasis on the educational component, and that's the angle I come at it from. If someone understands why the rule is what it is, they are more willing to move toward compliance," Rahme said at the time.

"You see a lightbulb come on and it's refreshing. You've made somebody aware, and that carries a whole lot more weight than a penalty the municipality has to enforce. Taking the time and providing an understanding is paramount in my mind to trying to get people thinking the right way and not just complying."

## THAT WAS THEN

The story is looking a little different in 2020. As it turns out, enough homeowners are refusing to comply with the inspections that local government officials appear to be giving up on an important requirement. According to a story in the *Haliburton Echo*, Dysart municipal councilors voted almost unanimously to drop pre inspection pumpouts from the Level 4 inspection program. Why? Because 112 of the first 964 property owners in the program

failed to complete the pumpouts or refused to submit a required third-party inspection report. "Although this represents only 12% of properties, beyond issuing 112 orders to comply, dealing with even a quarter of these infractions is not possible with our current staffing," Karl Korpela, chief building officer, told the council. So Korpela asked the council to drop the pumpout provision, and the officials went along with him.

So let me get this straight:

The council had approved inspections with pumpouts in 2017 because they believed emptying the tank provided the best way to check on the functionality of septic systems. Homeowners complied with the program at first, but soon many decided to ignore the rules. Regulators complained about having to do their job by enforcing the rules. Rather than follow through with the inspection program they approved, councilors gave up on the inspections.

Got it. Just so I understand, a handful of people who thumb their noses at important environmental safety laws are now in control of what goes on in Dysart. That's right. Don't listen to the onsite professionals who make a compelling argument that an inspection isn't complete without emptying the tank to check on its condition. Rather, listen to people who aren't experts in the field.

## FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

For one, the newspaper reported that Korpela said, "based on his research, environmentally, 'There's no benefit to a mandatory pumpout.'" He told the council that pumpouts could still be required when deemed necessary by an inspector. But how is an inspector going to know a pumpout is necessary when he can't see the condition of the tank? Apart from the pumping issue. Korpela also intimated that because homeowners were to

continued...

choose a qualified inspector from an approved list, the inspectors "may therefore feel they have an obligation of helping the owner pass an inspection." Is he saying these licensed professional inspectors would forge their reports to help the homeowners? That's insulting to the onsite profession and a topic for another column.

Then there's Deputy Mayor Pat Kennedy, who exhibited his ignorance about wastewater when he questioned land application methods and said sludge is better left in the septic tank. "We're pumping out septage that's being looked after by a perfectly good septic system," he said, according to the newspaper.

So, Kennedy is among the uneducated who don't realize septic tanks require periodic pumping to work properly? He is part of the same government that approved the Level 4 inspections in the first place and had to have been told about the importance of onsite system maintenance.

### **ROBUST PROCESS NEEDED**

A year ago, Rahme told me it is critically important to check the wear and tear on many older concrete tanks in the lake's region.

"It's important when doing these inspections to be as robust as possible with our process, and the best way to do that is with a pumpout. It's the only way to check the integrity of the tank," he said at the time. "We have a very aged population on our lakes, a lot of retirees, and these people are taking a lot of medications and passing them through the septic tanks. They are corrosive to the tanks, and we're seeing a lot of deterioration, end walls being eaten out."

One homeowner who was on board with the inspection program a year ago is John Smith, a member of the Kennisis Lake association who was consequently elected as a counselor representing Dysart. At the time he was hopeful. "Most people

want to do the right thing. Lots of people care deeply about the lake and want to do their part," he told me.

Smith was the only councilor who wanted to maintain the required inspections at this meeting. He argued it isn't fair to change the rules after many homeowners willingly paid for the pumpouts and a small percentage balked at the cost. "Four thousand dollars, people on an island paid for a barge, because Dysart said it was necessary," Smith said.

Rahme may have been forecasting a little trouble ahead with these inspections when he threw out a caution a year ago, but he then said he would counter misinformation through consumer education.

"Unfortunately, money outweighs common sense in a lot of cases. Fast and cheap is the way of the world these days, and that's not always going to give you the best result," he said. "My personal endeavor is to show people if you spend more money now, you're going to get paid back in spades because it's not just your pocketbook you have to worry about. If we have one blue-green algae breakout in our lakes, your property value is going to drop by 30%. That hits home."

### **TAKE ANOTHER LOOK**

Although the council voted for changes to the law, including ending the pre inspection pumpout, the revisions must go before the Environment and Climate Change Committee for review and then return to the council for confirmation at a later date, the newspaper reported.




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