



EPA Decentralized Wastewater Program: Overview and Updates

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Presentation Outline

- EPA Decentralized Program Background
- Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership
- SepticSmart Week

Disclaimer: The comments made in this presentation are those of the presenter and not of NOWRA or the Mega-Conference sponsors.

Decentralized Program Background

- 1997 Report to Congress on Decentralized Systems in the U.S.
 - Primary Finding: Decentralized systems can provide the same level of treatment, and may be less expensive than centralized wastewater (sewer) treatment
- Early 2000s: Decentralized Program created including issuance of many guidance documents, and MOU Partnership
- EPA program provides non-regulatory program support focused on outreach tools for homeowners, counties and states

Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership



Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership Priorities

1. **Increase outreach and public education** to ensure decentralized wastewater and septic systems are properly maintained to protect water quality and human health
2. **Identify and utilize current information and data** on the use and performance of decentralized wastewater and septic systems in the US
3. **Promote the benefits of advanced decentralized treatment technologies** within the wastewater industry and to the public
4. **Share information on funding sources and pursue innovative public and private financing options** to help communities and homeowners replace, upgrade, or maintain decentralized wastewater systems
5. **Expand mechanisms to address workforce, education, training, and research needs** related to the decentralized wastewater industry to improve future sustainability

Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership

- MOU Renewed every 3 years
- MOU began in 2005 with 8 partners
- 20 partners in 2020
- 2023 was the 7th MOU Renewal, 5 new partners
 - International Code Council (ICC)
 - National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
 - Ocean Sewage Alliance (OSA)
 - WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
 - USDA-Rural Development (USDA-RD)

MOU Workplan Priorities

EPA and MOU Partners completed the following activities in 2024:

EPA expanded the number of communities receiving technical assistance - currently supporting 36 new communities

- Priority 2-1: Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap

Septic Tank Additives Fact Sheet & Climate Change Resource Guide

- Priority 3-1A: Develop materials that showcase decentralized research, technologies, and approaches relative to climate and weather impacts

Revise and update EPA's Homeowner's Guide to Septic Systems for Tribal Communities

- Priority 1-1B: Update resource materials for Tribal and indigenous audiences

Revise and update the SepticSmart Week Public Outreach Guide

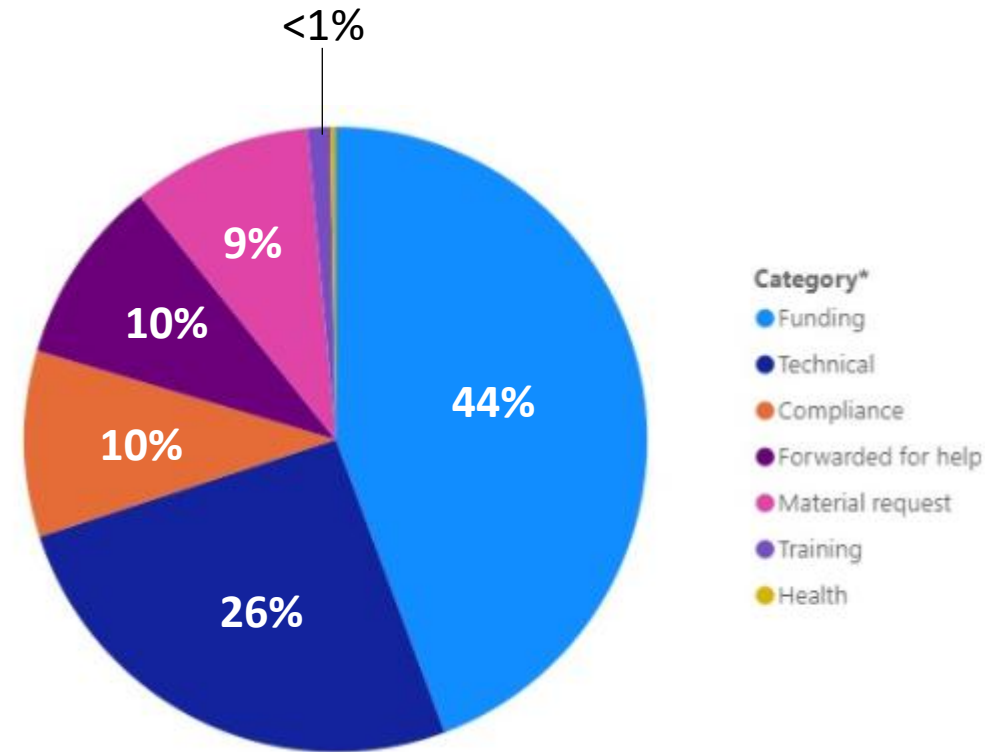
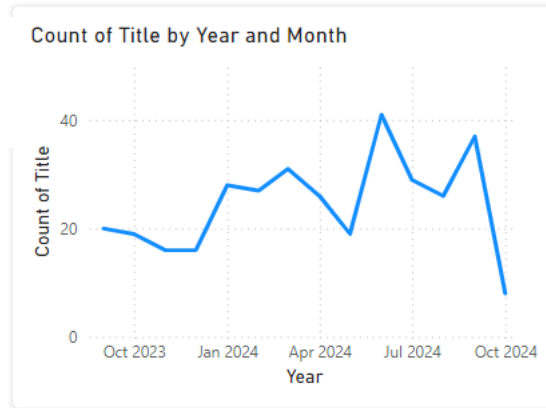
- Priority 1-1C: Revise and update SepticSmart Week social media guide for partners

MOU Workplan Priorities

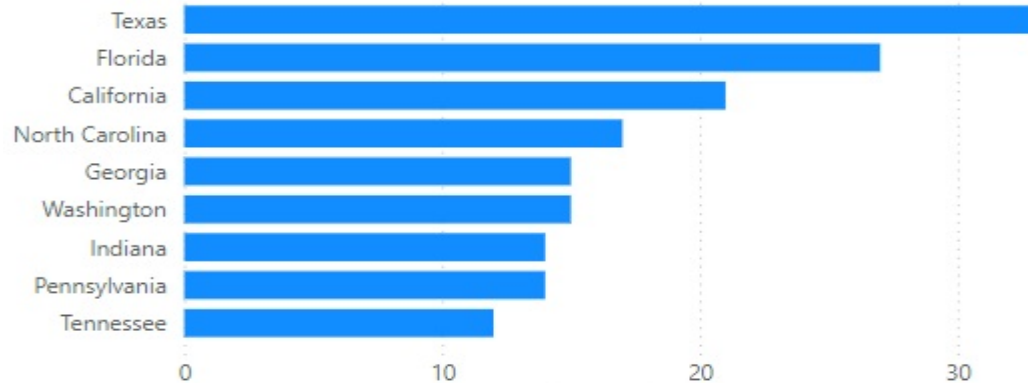
- EPA has identified the following priorities for 2025:
- **Priority 1-2:** Identify opportunities to promote the SepticSmart program
- **Priority 2-2:** Connect communities to funding sources through technical assistance
- **Priority 4-1:** Develop a factsheet on septic system prevalence and distribution
- **Priority 4-2:** Update the EPA website with septic system information from U.S. Census
- **Priority 5-2:** Develop a prioritized list of decentralized research needs

Septic System Contact Us Inquiries

Quarterly Inquires

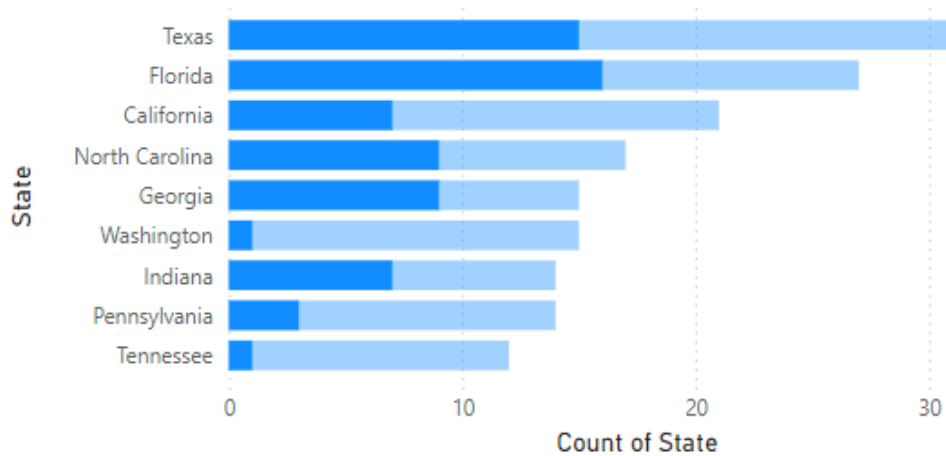


Inquires by State



Funding & Technical Inquiry Breakdown

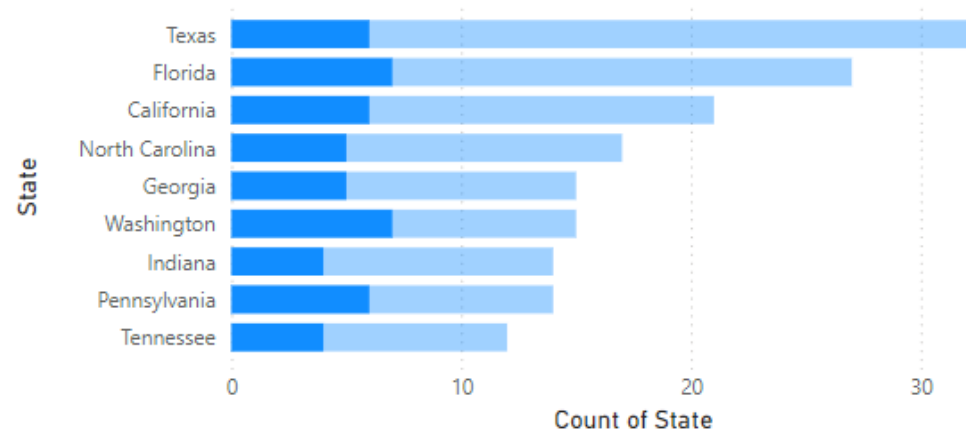
Funding Inquires by State FY 2024



1. Florida- 16
2. Texas- 15
3. North Carolina- 9
4. Georgia- 9
5. California- 9

1. Florida- 7
2. Washington- 7
3. Pennsylvania- 6
4. Texas- 6
5. North Carolina- 6

Technical Inquires by State FY 2024



Additives Fact Sheet & Climate Change Resource Guide



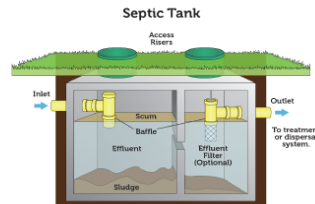
Overview

Onsite wastewater treatment systems (commonly referred to as septic systems) treat human and domestic waste before returning the water to the environment. Septic tank additives containing bacteria or chemicals are commonly marketed to improve system performance. However, use of these additives is not recommended for domestic wastewater treatment because there is already a significant presence of bacteria, enzymes, yeasts, fungi, and other microorganisms in onsite wastewater treatment systems (U.S. EPA, 2002). Additive products can be ineffective or even harm system operation and the environment. Any operational issues should be assessed by a septic system professional or local regulator.

Potential Issues Associated with Septic Tank Additives

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency does not recommend the use of septic system additives containing bacteria or chemicals for the following reasons:

- **Potentially harmful impacts.** Some of these products may interfere with the breakdown of waste, contribute to system clogging, and contaminate groundwater and receiving waters (Pradhan et al., 2011; Lee & Coyne, 2012).
- **Unnecessary for operation.** Homeowners can save money by avoiding products that are marketed to improve system performance. Onsite wastewater treatment systems already contain the bacteria, enzymes, yeasts, fungi, and microorganisms needed to function properly (Harwood, 2006).
- **Limited research.** Consumer goods sold as septic system cleaners, decomposers, deodorizers, organic digesters, or enhancers may have only limited third-party research demonstrating manufacturer claims (Pradhan et al., 2011).
- **Local limitations.** Many individual states and localities have information on the proper operation of septic systems, including lists of approved additives per their rules and/or regulations. Check with your local and/or state department of health or department of environmental protection for additional information on allowable septic system additives in your area.



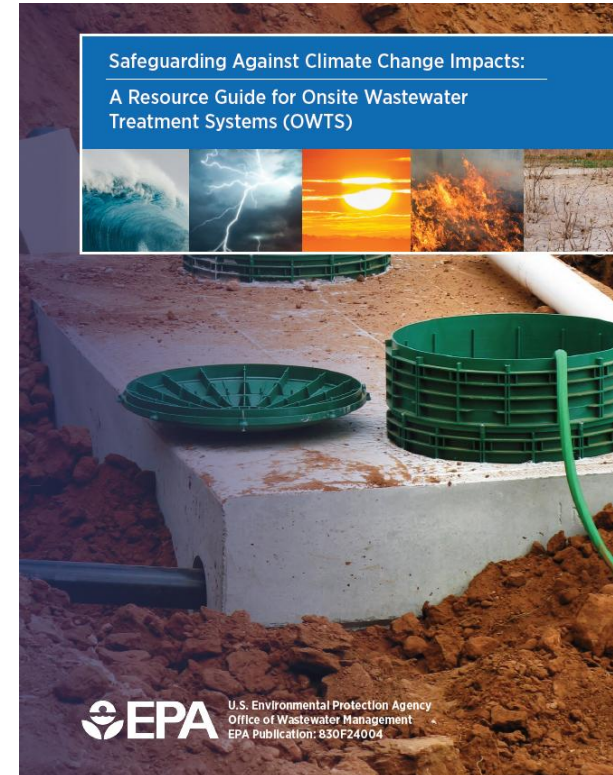
Please note: The number of compartments in a septic tank vary by state and region. (U.S. EPA, 2022)

For more information, visit <https://www.epa.gov/septic>.

1

Available Now!

<https://www.epa.gov/septic/septic-system-care-and-maintenance>



Coming Soon!



SepticSmart Week

2024 Highlights

September 16-20, 2024

<https://www.epa.gov/septic/septicSMART-week>




SepticSmart Success Metrics

918 mentions

+ 19% from 2023

 = 286

 = 218

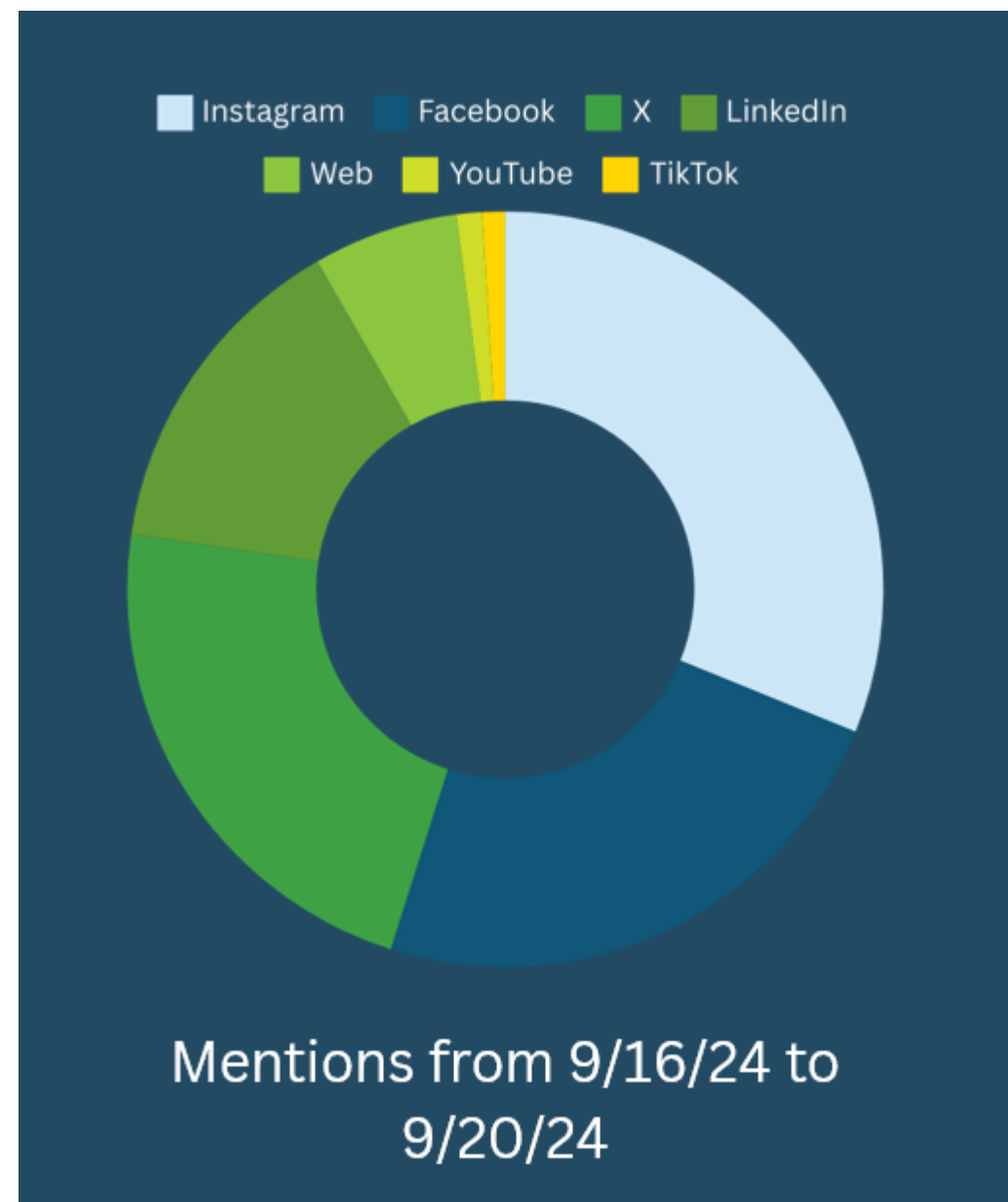
 = 206

 = 132

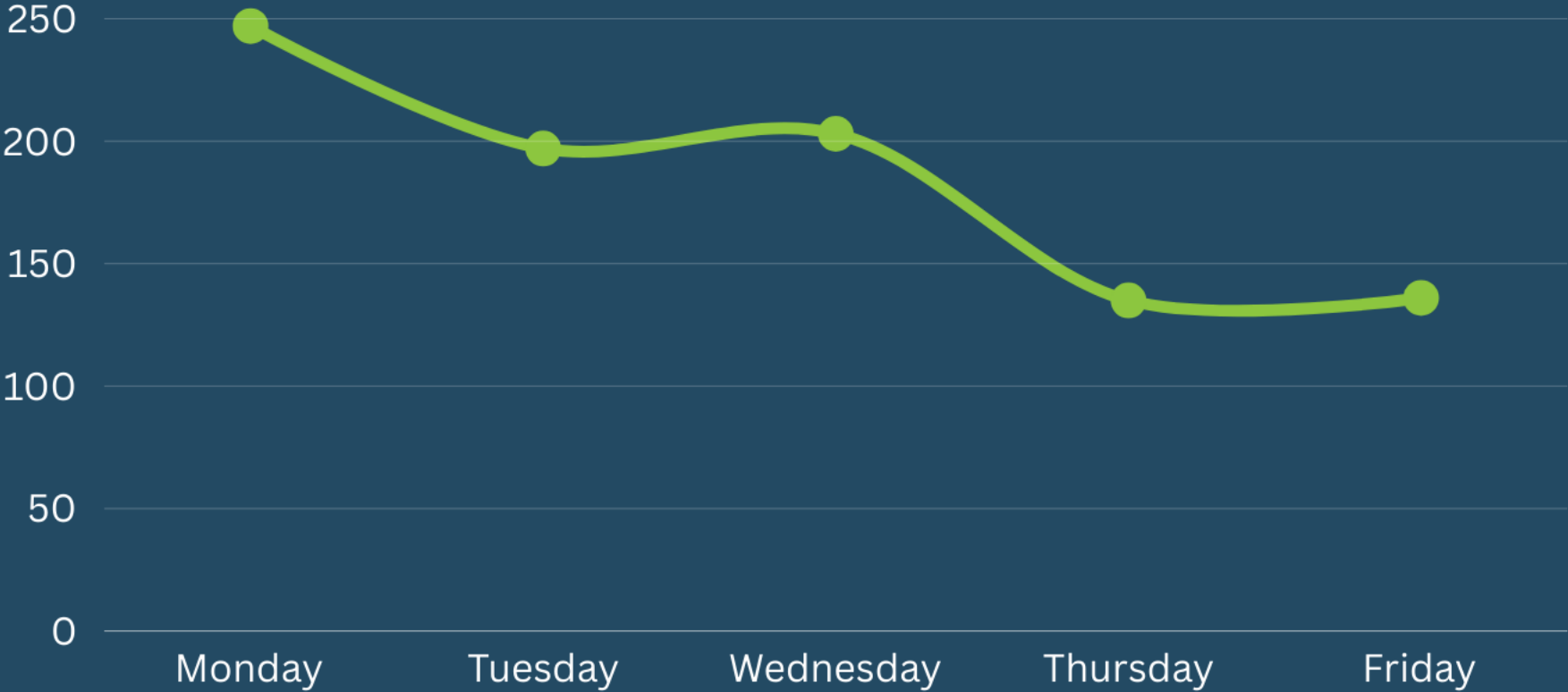
 = 57

 = 10

 = 9

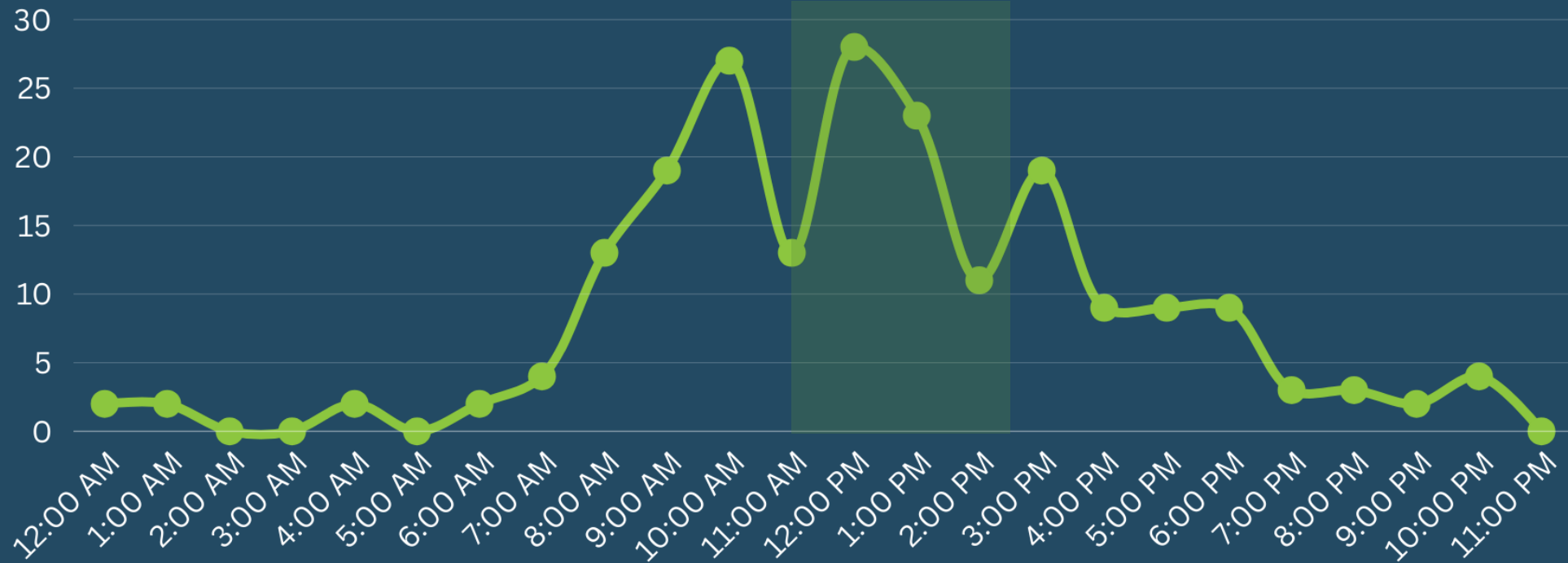


Mentions by Day



Monday (9/16) Mentions by Hour

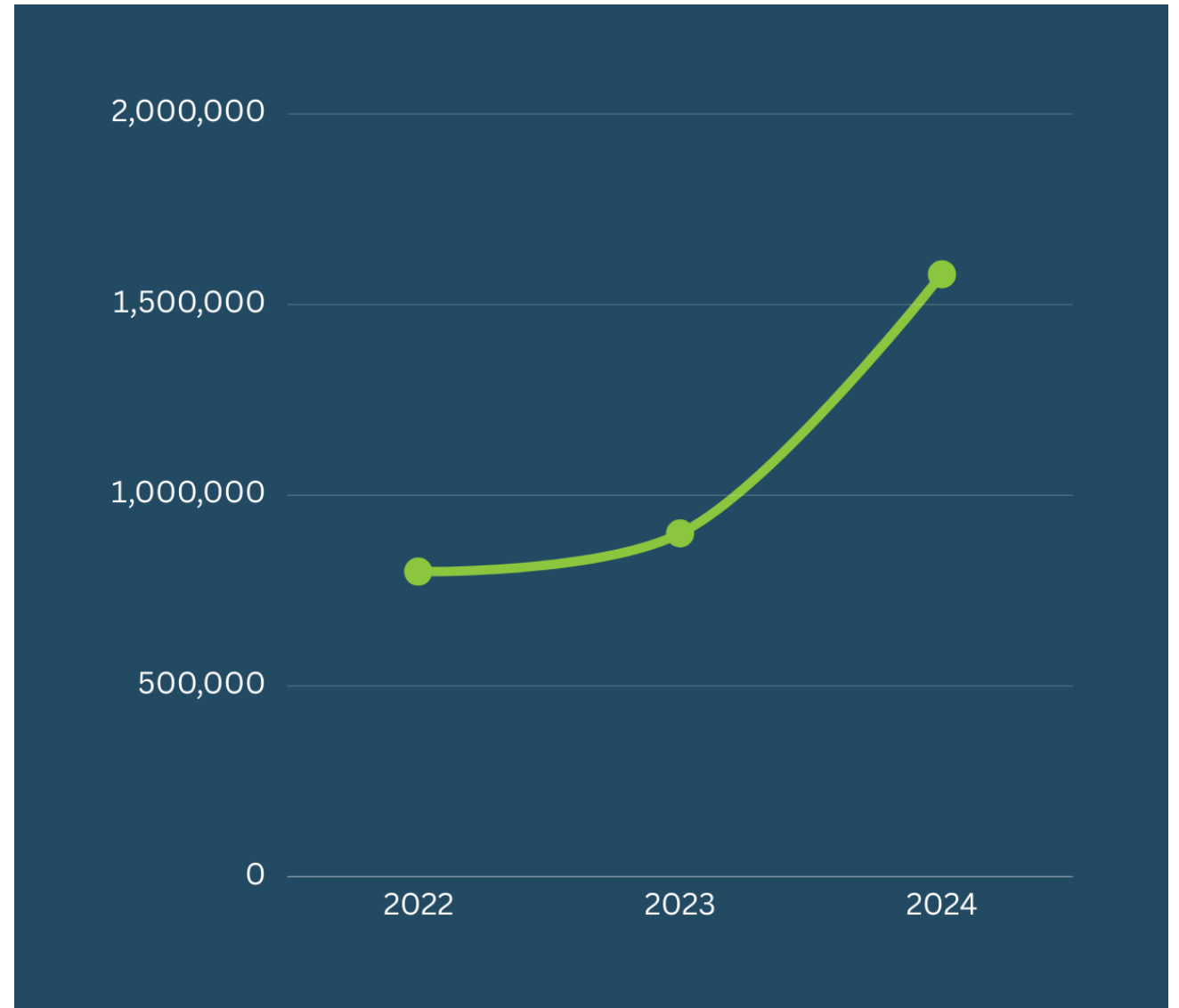
MOU "Thunderclap" messaging campaign from 12pm - 2pm ET



1,579,369

unique social media accounts
reached in 2024

+ 75% from 2023



16,213 interactions

with SepticSmart Week posts



1,400
likes



2,926 video views



978 reshares



10,843 X
impressions



66 comments

EPA Website Traffic

Total Page Views	2024	2023
Avg Weekly Views: Jan-August	22,463	18,495
SepticSmart Week Views	32,065	18,532

+43% increase in web traffic during SepticSmart Week 2024
+73% increase compared to 2023

11 Proclamations

6
states



3
professional
organizations



2
municipalities/
counties



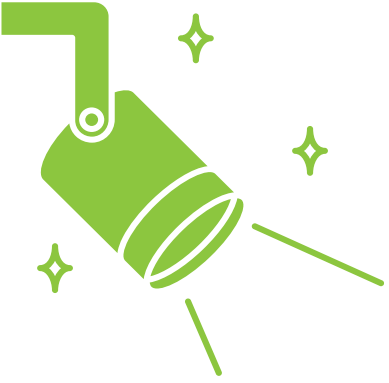


SepticSmart 2024 Outreach

Community Events

- **Michigan** Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy Department hosted a 'Septic System 101' webinar on Monday, 9/16.
- University of **Minnesota's** Water Resource Center held a 'Being Septic Smart' webinar on Tuesday, 9/17.
- Geauga County (**Ohio**) Soil and Water Conservation District and Geauga Public Health held a free, in-person SepticSmart program at the Geauga County Public Library on Tuesday, 9/17.
- The **Virginia** Cooperative Extension offered an in-person 'Septic System Best Management Practices' workshop in Page County, VA on Thursday, 9/19.





SepticSmart Socials

Spotlighted Posts

Instagram

Spotlighted posts

In Nassau County, eligible property owners can take advantage of grants of up to \$20,000 to upgrade their antiquated cesspools and conventional septic systems to nitrogen-reducing systems.



A Hydro-Action System being installed (left) and Fuji Clean (right)

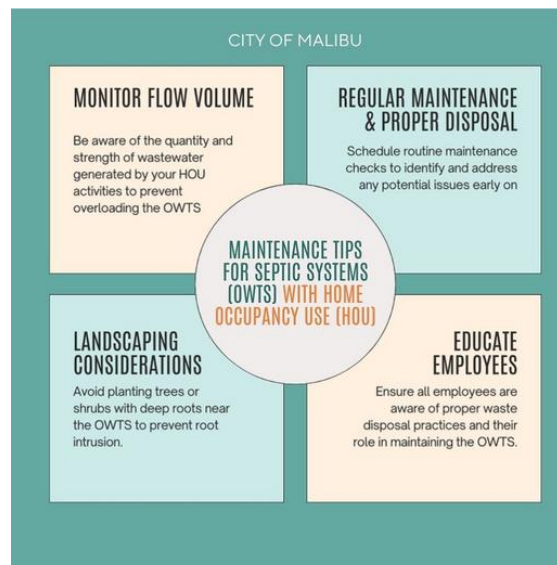
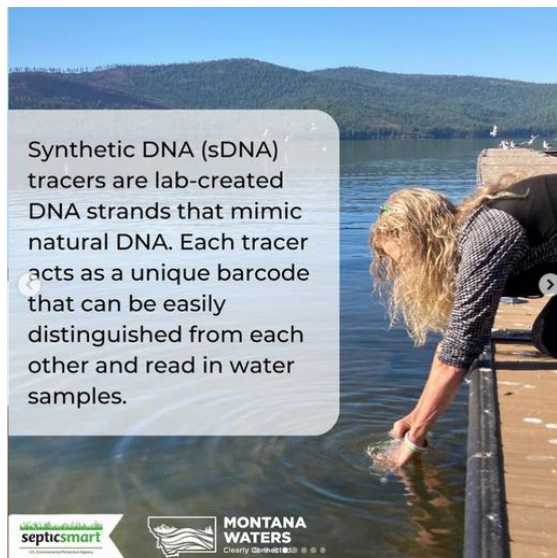


APPLY TODAY
(516) 364-5861



<https://www.nassauswcd.org/SEPTIC>

Manhasset Bay Protection Committee promotes Nassau County, NY, septic maintenance grants.



Montana Waters, a Montana water conservation group, shares how they used synthetic DNA to monitor how septic systems impact local water quality.



The City of Malibu, CA, shares custom septic maintenance tips - highlighting the importance of home occupancy use.

Facebook

Spotlighted posts

LIVINGSTON COUNTY Health Department

Taking Care of Your Septic System

Safe Items to Flush

Toilets are not trash cans! Only flush the following items to maintain your septic system.

- ✓ Human waste (pee & poop)
- ✓ Toilet paper

Never Flush

- ✗ Cat litter
- ✗ Cigarette butts
- ✗ Coffee grounds/food
- ✗ Condoms
- ✗ Dental Floss
- ✗ Diapers
- ✗ Feminine hygiene products
- ✗ Flushable wipes/baby wipes
- ✗ Household cleaners:
 - Gasoline
 - Oil
 - Pesticides
 - Antifreeze
 - Paint
- ✗ Pharmaceuticals

LIVINGSTON COUNTY Health Department

Livingston County, MI, reminds residents that “toilets are not trash cans!”

NH LAKES | **SepticSmart Week**

From SepticSmart to LakeSmart—Restoring and Protecting Our Lakes For Future Generations

PREPARING your Septic System FOR A STORM

80% of Nags Head properties have a septic system. Do you know about yours?

Read more for tips to preserve and maintain your home and local waterways during storm events

TOWN OF NAGS HEAD

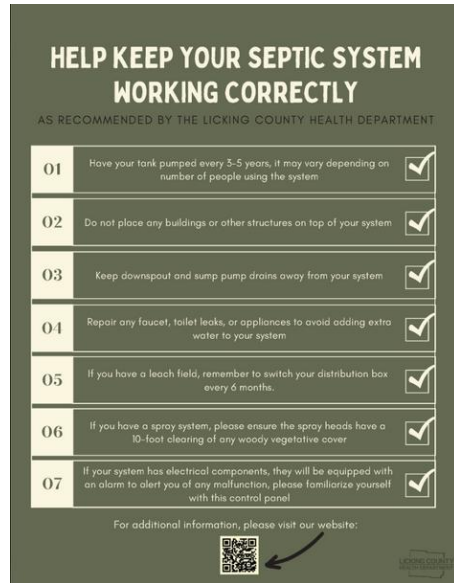
New Hampshire Lakes, a lake conservation nonprofit, connects #SepticSmart to #LakeSmart.

Nags Head, a town on North Carolina’s outer banks, provides tips for preparing septic systems for inevitable hurricanes and storms.



X (Twitter)

Spotlighted posts



Licking County, OH, developed custom graphics with #SepticSmart tips for county residents.



SepticSmart Week September 16-20, 2024

Do Your Part and Be Septic Smart by:

1. Only flushing the 3 Ps.
2. Using water efficiently.
3. Inspecting and pumping frequently.
4. Maintaining plants and vegetation near the system to prevent blockages.



Jim-Bob, West Virginia amateur comedian, advocates for Yoda as a spokesperson for Septic Smart Week. He writes, “There is no try, only doo.”

Orange County Sanitation District promotes the “3 Ps,” encouraging septic system owners to only flush, pee, poop, and (toilet) paper.



Web

Spotlighted stories



MiamiDade County RER @MiamiDadeRER · Follow

Did you know that King Tide flooding can cause your septic tank to malfunction? This can have an impact on the health of Biscayne Bay. Be #SepticSmart! If you see flooding, be sure to call 311 to report the time and location.



6:00 PM · Sep 19, 2024

2 ❤️ Reply Copy link

[Read more on X](#)

WNMF, Tampa Bay-area nonprofit news station, writes story about king tides as a threat to septic systems.



County Sanitarian does Vining a solid

Grants fund new septic systems for several Tama Co. communities

GOVERNMENT

SEP 20, 2024

RUBY F. MCALLISTER
Crappe Reporter
news@northtamatelagraph.com

SHARE TWEET



Download PDF File

File size: 146MB, OS: Win...

Arlo Cibula and his pup Mr. Wilson pictured at his and wife Nancy Cibula's Vining home earlier this month following the installation of a new septic system financed through a grant from the Iowa Finance Authority's Water Infrastructure Fund. The grant – which replaces aging private septic systems in unsewered communities like Vining – was funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). PHOTO BY RUBY F. MCALLISTER

VINING – After being injured in a serious car accident earlier this year, Vining residents Arlo and Nancy Cibula recently received a solid win by way of a completely free, new septic system – arriving just in time for SepticSmart Week – and it's all thanks to the efforts of County Sanitarian Chris Behrens.

Tama-Toledo News Chronicle, local Iowa newspaper, published a story promoting state septic grants in relation to SepticSmart Week.



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SEP 16

EPA's 12th Annual SepticSmart Week: Do Your Part, Be SepticSmart!



The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is joining states, Tribes and local partners in celebrating SepticSmart Week from Sept. 16-20 and to provide homeowners and renters with information about protecting public health and properly maintaining septic systems. This weeklong, nationwide public education campaign is helpful for the one-fifth of U.S. households that use onsite septic systems or small community cluster septic systems to treat their wastewater.

Oklahoma Farm Report promotes SepticSmart Week for their agricultural news audience across five states.



YouTube

Spotlighted videos



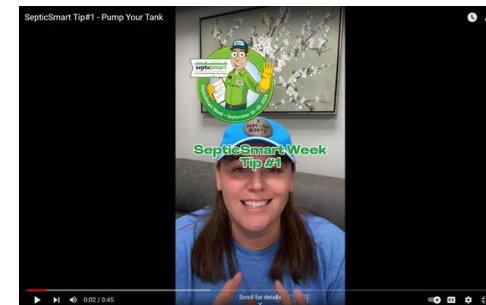
Washington Department of Ecology developed two new educational videos: “Intro to Septic” and “Septic Maintenance”



Iowa Department of Natural Resources created a video “investigating criminals,” like dishwasher pods and disposable wipes, that disrupt septic systems.



Indiana Onsite Wastewater Professionals Association animated a SepticSmart Week video.

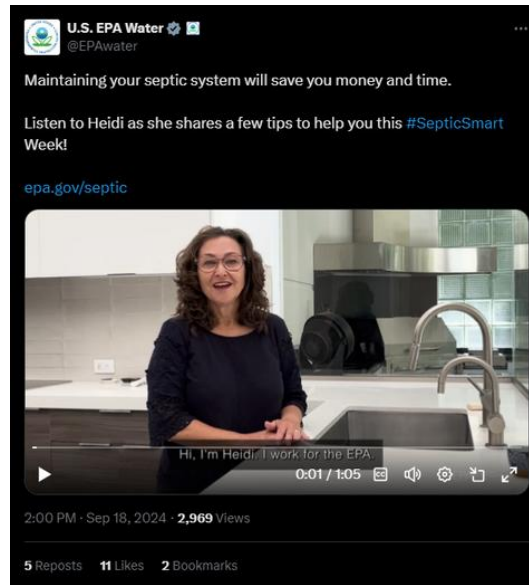


That Septic Girl posted a series of SepticSmart tips, amplifying SepticSmart Week messaging.

EPA Socials



Image shared across Instagram, X, and LinkedIn.



EPA filmed a two-part series of septic maintenance tips featuring EPA Office of Water's Heidi Faller. The videos were shared to X.



Instagram reel with tips for what can, and can't, go down the drain.

New! 2024 ASTHO Podcast

752: EPA Wastewater Gap Initiative, New PH Warehouse Expansion

Tweet Share

Zach Lowenstein, program manager with the EPA's Office of Wastewater Management, discusses the Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap initiative; Jon Lujan, public health emergency preparedness program manager for the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, details the...



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LISTEN ON

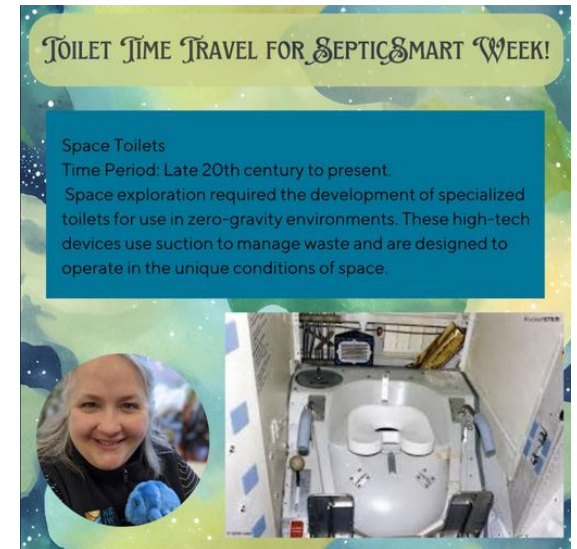
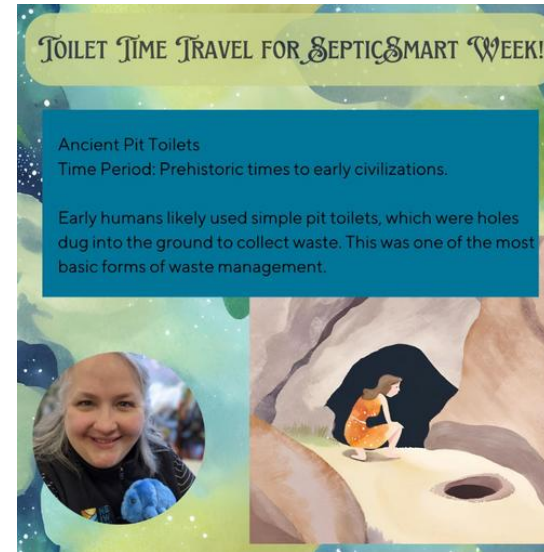
- The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, featured an interview with EPA's Zach Lowenstein about EPA's Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap Initiative during SepticSmart Week.
- Host Jansen Silvers also highlighted the ASTHO SepticSmart Week proclamation.
- The podcast was shared to ASTHO social media accounts on X, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

SepticSmart Stakeholder Profiles

Michelle Jenkins

Creator profile

- Information Officer at the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission
- Developed 10 infographics for a series titled: *Toilet Time Travel for Septic Smart Week*
 - Explored the history of toilets, from prehistoric times until now
- Shared to personal LinkedIn, and received **1,422 impressions, 30 likes, 3 reposts, and 4 comments**



Geauga County, OH

County profile

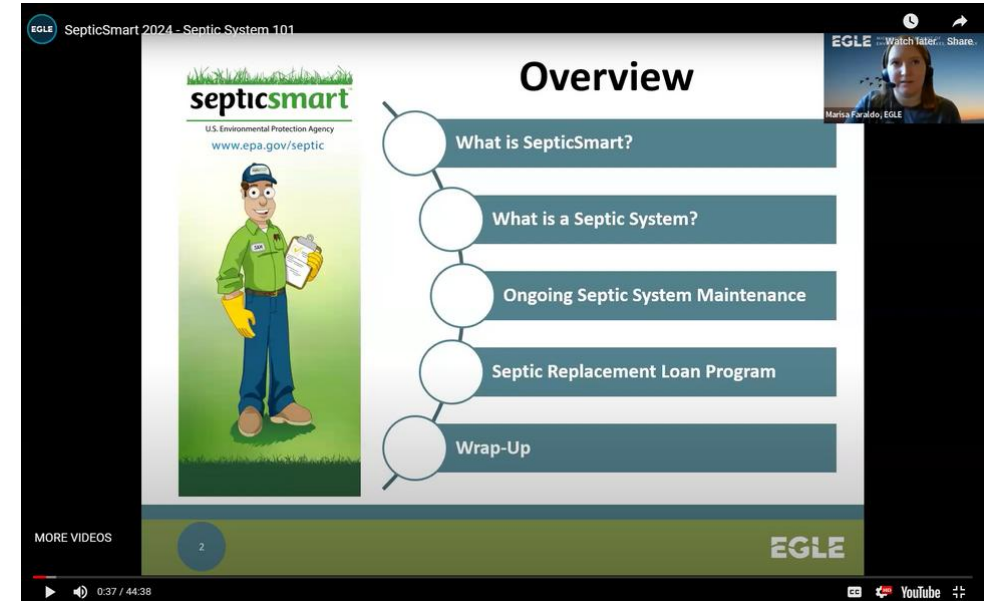
- Geauga County Soil and Water Conservation District and Public Health Department
 - Hosted annual workshops since 2017
 - 31 participants in 2024
 - **Door prize:** one free septic pumping! Winners?
- Sanitarians **use EPA SepticSmart materials** to provide lessons on proper septic system maintenance
- **“To Flush or Not To Flush” Game**
 - Attendees reach into a box and pick up flushable wipes, paper towels, and other items
 - Learn what can and can’t enter their septic system



Michigan Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy Department (EGLE)

State agency profile

- SepticSmart/Septic System 101 Webinar
 - Training geared towards homeowners
 - 1,686 registrants
 - 146 questions asked in the chat
- Post-webinar survey indicated nearly all respondents thought the webinar was Good or Excellent
 - 47.7% response rate
- Produced SepticSmart article for MiEnvironment Newsletter
- Posted: 3 Facebook posts to EGLE's page with 6K+ followers and 1 LinkedIn post to LinkedIn page with 11,967 followers



Goals for 2025

- Convene the SepticSmart steering group to provide input on outreach and messaging for 2025
- Develop engaging content for targeted audiences
- Increase promotion of SepticSmart materials to Tribal and Pacific Islander communities
- Identify new strategies for promoting SepticSmart materials directly to homeowners
- Increase the number of states that promote SepticSmart Week
 - Blog posts, newsletters, proclamations

QUESTIONS?