



Minnesota  
Pollution  
Control  
Agency

# Small Community Wastewater Needs in Minnesota

## A Strategy for Progress

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**S**mall communities face special challenges in finding solutions to wastewater treatment problems. In an effort to better understand the needs of these communities and find proactive ways to meet those needs, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has developed a Small Community Wastewater Strategy.

### Accomplishments

The first step in developing this strategy was to assess the progress that has been made to date. In the past 12 years, 111 small communities made significant progress toward resolving wastewater treatment issues. These communities serve an estimated 32,000 people and generate nearly 700 million gallons of wastewater annually. The vast majority of these communities chose either to connect to an existing treatment facility or construct a new treatment facility; approximately one-third of the communities selected individual or cluster subsurface sewage treatment options.

### Wastewater Needs Survey

Although progress has been made, it is clear that additional work is needed. To fully assess the current situation, the MPCA developed a wastewater needs survey and distributed it to counties throughout the state. Collectively, the counties identified 1,025 small communities with wastewater needs.

Small communities are identified as clusters of five or more homes and businesses on lots less than one acre in size. Of these, 103 are incorporated areas (cities), or portions of incorporated areas, and 922 are unincorporated areas. The

unincorporated areas include 688 lake communities, 174 small cross-road communities, 48 subdivisions and 12 other community types.

The survey identified 33 areas with known or suspected 'community' surface discharges or straight pipes. Community straight pipes collect sewage from a number of homes and businesses and discharge the sewage directly to surface water without proper treatment.

The survey also identified an estimated 73 communities suspected to contain some 'individual' straight pipe discharges. Individual straight pipes collect sewage from a single home or business and discharge the sewage directly onto the ground or into a surface water without proper treatment.

### Strategy: Goal, Priorities and Action Items

The main goal of the Small Community Wastewater Strategy is to eliminate straight pipe discharge of raw or partially settled sewage into surface waters or onto the land surface by December 31, 2014. The first step toward achieving this goal is to prioritize finding solutions for the following types of small communities.

- 1.) Communities with a common straight pipe discharging to surface waters in both incorporated and unincorporated areas,

#### MPCA Area Offices:

**Rochester area:**

507/285-7343

**Mankato area:**

507/389-5977

**Marshall area:**

507/537-7146

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**Detroit Lakes area:**

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**Brainerd area:**

218/828-2492

**Duluth area:**

218/723-4660

**Metro area:**

651/296-6300

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800/657-3864

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- 2.) Communities with individual straight pipes discharging to surface waters or to the ground surface, and
- 3.) Lake communities with some type of subsurface system, but containing poor soil conditions and lots too small for placement of effective individual on-site sewage-treatment systems.

Prioritization will also consider impaired waters, receiving environments, volume and strength of wastewater and local priorities.

The strategy contains three parts and 14 action items. The MPCA assigned regional teams throughout the state to begin implementation of this strategy. In the coming months, regional teams will expand to include community stakeholders in a more cooperative approach to addressing wastewater needs. The following information summarizes the major elements of the Small Community Wastewater Strategy.

**Part I: Identify key partners, roles and responsibilities; Establish process for collaboration among key partners**

- A.) Identify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.
- B.) Develop cooperative agreements among partners.
- C.) Build political will for legislative action to provide adequate funding.
- D.) Obtain sufficient funding for planning, education and construction. A grant program for low income residents is needed.

**Part II: Determine a process for MPCA staff to help solve wastewater issues for incorporated communities and unincorporated areas.**

- A.) Regional MPCA teams established and will include external partners as needed.
- B.) Determine team responsibilities. Pursue opportunities for improved coordination.
- C.) Develop guidance documents for staff.
- D.) Identify effective compliance and enforcement tools.
- E.) Collect data to document water quality improvements following elimination of straight pipe discharges.

**Part III: Provide effective support of local programs and efforts to solve wastewater issues.**

- A.) Provide guidance to counties, lake communities and unincorporated areas.
- B.) Provide sound technical support to local programs. Share information, success stories and case studies with local programs.
- C.) Help establish local wastewater management entities.
- D.) Help develop educational materials for wastewater management entities.

Successfully eliminating the 106 small community straight pipe discharges by the end of 2014 requires adequate funding and coordination among stakeholders. These elements are critical to the success of the Small Community Wastewater Strategy.

**For More Information**

For additional information on the Small Community Wastewater Strategy, contact

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The full report, *Small Community Wastewater Needs in Minnesota*, is available on the MPCA Web site at <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/wq-wwtp1-06.pdf>.

The report also provides a list of online wastewater planning resources including educational tools, technical assistance and funding resources.