



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEW CASTLE

The Voter

September/October 2008

Are You Drinking Your Neighbor's Sewage?

Many people have no idea how a septic system works. In fact, when new homeowners discover that they have a septic system their response is something like, "You mean our sewage eventually ends up in our yard?" Well, not exactly.

LWV of Westchester and LWV of New Castle have spent the past ten years investigating water quality issues. We have completed one study on stormwater and two in-depth studies on sewage disposal, which identified improperly maintained and failing septic systems as a very real threat to our drinking water — our reservoirs and groundwater wells. This is a public health issue. Since completing our studies we have been advocating for a countywide and county-run septic management plan. However, before we look at a management plan, let us first understand how a functioning septic system should look. Onsite systems (or septic systems) are actually efficient and cost-effective means of treating sewage if they are properly sited, constructed, maintained, and managed.

How a Septic System Works

Currently, the Westchester County Department of Health (DOH) issues permits for the siting and construction of septic systems. When a septic system is suitably located, properly designed and installed, and adequately maintained, it is an effective and economical waste disposal system.

A septic system has four basic parts: a pipe from your house, a septic tank, a drainfield, and the soil. All of the wastewater from your house exits via the pipe to the septic tank. The septic tank is a buried, water-tight tank where the wastewater stays long enough for the heavy solids to settle and be partially decomposed by bacteria to form sludge. Lighter solids and grease float to the top forming a scum layer.

The remaining wastewater exits the tank and is discharged into the drainfield where it is further treated by the soil. The water percolates in the soil, removing harmful bacteria, viruses and nutrients.

Once installed, the maintenance part is up to the system owner, and today there is no countywide requirement or education program on how to properly maintain a septic system.

How Do I Maintain My Septic System?

Proper maintenance involves two main activities: regular pumpouts and inspections.

Pumpouts

The sludge and scum that remain in your tank need to be pumped out on a periodic but regular basis. The frequency of these pumpouts de-

President's Message

After a ruling from a federal judge in White Plains that allowed the project to go forward, the New York State Department of Transportation has finally begun the reconstruction of the Route 120 Bridge in Chappaqua. With the DOT ranking this as one of the most structurally compromised of some 1,700 state bridges in DOT's Hudson Valley region (Region 8), it would appear that construction is beginning not a moment too soon.

During the anticipated two years it will take to complete the work, two lanes of traffic will be maintained over the bridge. This is crucial — with police, ambulance and fire services; Town Hall, and the Chappaqua Library located on one side of the bridge, and the majority of New Castle's population located on the other. Maintaining traffic ensures that the Chappaqua hamlet will remain accessible as one of the vital centers of our town.

Ensuring that the hamlet remains economically viable depends on us. Some merchants have, quite naturally, expressed concerns about construction having a negative impact on their businesses. It's up to us to make sure that doesn't happen. The intimate mix of small shops and restaurants in the hamlet is part of the charm that many people embrace as one of most appealing features of a living in a small community. Over the next two years of construction, these businesses deserve our continued patronage. Let's not let them down.

Sheila

CANDIDATES' NIGHT

Wed., Oct. 22nd

at 7:30pm

Chappaqua Library

See page 3 for more details.

Candidates' Night Wednesday, October 22, 7:30pm at Chappaqua Library

The League of Women Voters of New Castle is sponsoring a Fall Candidates' Night on Wednesday, October 22nd. It will take place at the Chappaqua Library, located at 195 South Greeley Avenue, beginning at 7:30 pm. Come with your questions for the candidates!

The League anticipates candidates in the following races to participate:

US House of Representatives, 18th Congressional District:
Nita Lowey and Jim Russell (contested)

NY State Senate, 37th Senatorial District:
Liz Feld and Suzi Oppenheimer (contested)

NY State Assembly, 89th Assembly District:
Adam T. Bradley (uncontested)

Questions for the candidates may also be e-mailed by October 21st to lwvnewcastle@optonline.net.

Look for details on NCCTV broadcast of Candidates' Night. Check on the League's website at www.lwvnewcastle.org; or NCCTV's website at www.ncctv.org.

Candidates' Night is your opportunity to ask your questions and hear the candidates debate the issues. Please come and participate!

Help Put the Fun in Fundraiser!

Fundraiser co-chairs Kathy Rothschild and Maud Bailey are recruiting members to join the Fundraiser Committee. Contact Kathy (238-2245, kkroths@mac.com) or Maud (238-7577, maudathalie@aol.com) if you can spare a few hours each month.

Become a League Observer Keep up with What's Happening in Your Town.

Openings available for Town Board, School Board and Library Board meetings.

Contact the League:
lwvnewcastle@optonline.net

There's Still Time!!

Are you Registered to Vote? Need an Absentee Ballot?

You have until October 10th to mail in your voter registration form for the November 4th general election, and up to October 28th to mail in a request for an absentee ballot.

You can download both forms from the Westchester County Board of Elections' website at: www.westchestergov.com/boe — then click on "Voting" on the right-hand menu. Call (914) 995-5700 with questions. The BoE is located at 25 Quarropas Street, White Plains, NY 10601.

The New Castle League also has voter registration forms available. Contact us at lwvnewcastle@optonline.net, or call Sheila at 238-8994.

Poll Workers Needed for Nov 4th Election

The Westchester County Board of Elections is looking for poll workers for the upcoming general election. To be eligible, you must be a registered voter in Westchester County.

The hours are from 5:30am. until after the closing of the polls at 9:00pm, plus a 2.5-hour training session prior to the election.

Stipends are \$225 for Election Inspectors and Poll Clerks; and \$250 for Chair people and Election Coordinators. An additional \$25 is paid for attending the mandatory training session. Workers chosen to work as election coordinators or on the new voting machines may need additional training, for which they will also be compensated.

For more information, or to access the "poll worker application form," visit www.westchestergov.com/news_pollworkersneeded.htm, or contact the Board of Elections at 995-5700. Application deadline is October 15th.

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depends upon four major factors: the number of people in the household, the amount of wastewater used, the volume of solids in the wastewater (for example, using a garbage disposal increases the amount of solids), and the size of the septic tank. Taking all of these things into consideration, a tank generally needs to be pumped out every two to three years.

Inspections

The second task involved in maintaining a septic system is regular inspections. Experts in the field generally recommend an inspection every three years. A thorough inspection includes locating the system, uncovering access holes, flushing toilets, checking for signs of back up, measuring scum and sludge layers, identifying leaks, and inspecting mechanical components.

It should be noted that the company that inspects your system should be different from the company that pumps out your system. Inspectors should be licensed and certified.

The Problems of Not Maintaining A Septic System

First, if you do not properly maintain your septic system, it is very expensive to repair or replace the system.

Second, failing septic systems are a public health issue because they can contaminate the ground water that eventually becomes the drinking water for 9 million residents of NYC and Westchester County. This is because poorly treated sewage can transport toxins and carcinogens through groundwater to wells and reservoirs. In fact, according to the EPA, septic systems that are not properly maintained are the sec-

ond major cause of water pollution in the U.S.

In Westchester County, we have 40,000 septic systems, most of which are located in your watershed. The League believes that the County needs to protect our water supply by implementing a septic management plan across the county.

Components of a Good Management Plan

To quote the EPA's national report on septic systems, "it is the absence of a comprehensive management program that prevents onsite systems from being effective and reliable wastewater treatments." Since completing our Sewage Disposal Studies, the League has been advocating for a countywide septic management plan. Although some progress has been made, we have more work to do.

As was already pointed out, maintaining a septic system is ultimately the responsibility of the homeowner. Therefore, the first component of a management plan is education. Currently there is no countywide education program on how to properly care for your system. However, the Board of Legislators has allocated \$60,000 in 2008 for septic education — part of what the League has been advocating for the past three years.

The County is also working on a database listing the 40,000-plus septic systems by address. This database is being created at the DOH as a consequence of a 2007 law requiring septage haulers to report each pumpout to the DOH. In addition, the members of the Northern Westchester Watershed Committee have committed to collecting and reporting to the DOH information on all septic systems in their towns, which will greatly enhance the database.

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Maintaining Your Septic System

Do

1. Conserve Water – excess water overloads your system
2. Direct downspouts away from the absorption field
3. Use grass and shallow-rooted plants to cover the fields; roots clog the field
4. Avoid the use of biological additives
5. Use household cleaners in moderation.
6. PUMP OUT YOUR TANK EVERY 2 -3 YEARS.

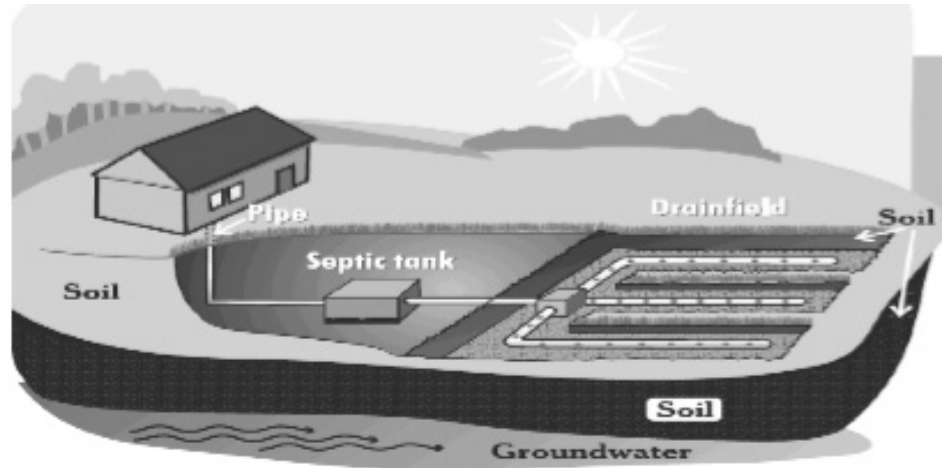
Do Not

1. Use garbage disposals; this adds too much "stuff" which clogs your fields.
2. Pour gasoline, paint thinners, pesticides, grease, or harmful chemicals down the drain.
3. Dispose of diapers, sanitary products, coffee grounds, paper towels or other large items down the drain; these clog your system.
4. Drive heavy equipment over the fields.
5. Plant trees or shrubs in the absorption field; roots invade the pipes and clog the field.

The next piece of the plan is to mandate regular pumpouts and inspections. First, the County must train and certify inspectors. Septic owners could select from a list of certified inspectors and contract, at their own expense, for an inspection every three to four years. Every septic owner would be required to pump out their system on a regular basis, depending on size of house, number or residents, etc. With the aforementioned database, it will be easy for the DOH to send a notice to a septic owner reminding them it is time for their inspection and/or inspections.

The new septage hauler law only requires a cursory “look” into the tank but is not a full blown inspection — AND, the haulers are not trained to do inspections — this is what the League was trying to get Board of Legislators (BOL) to add to the law — trained inspectors and proper inspections.

The League has suggested that the owner of a system which wasn't pumped, or didn't pass the inspection, would be warned to rectify the situation. If the problem is not addressed after a reasonable time, the County would send a truck to do it. A fine levied on the homeowner would pay for the pumpout. Generally, there would be no change in the homeowner's responsibility for his property. Homeowners would pay for their pumpout, and would receive a sticker showing the date completed, and the next time a pumpout should be done — just as one does with a car inspection. The information would be entered into the database; if no record of a pumpout and/or inspection is submitted, the County would send a reminder.



Why Doesn't Westchester County Have a Septic Management Plan?

You may be asking yourselves why a management plan has not been put in place already. After advocating for a management plan for the past few years, the hurdles, as we understand them from our meetings with the BOL, are: home rule issues, cost to the County and a concern about systems that appear to be irreparable.

In our opinion the issue of home rule, or the County not wanting to legislate how people take care of their property, is without merit. The county recently passed legislation requiring regular testing of drinking wells to protect those homeowners. However, if a septic system fails, it enters the groundwater affecting more than the immediate property and can become a public health issue. A potential risk to the public is EXACTLY what the County should be managing.

The County legislators have also cited “cost” as a stumbling block, but they have been unresponsive when the League has asked them to detail what they THINK the costs will be for a countywide management plan. The League believes that the costs to the County will include setting

up a database and sending out reminders about inspections. The costs of pumpouts and inspections are now, and should remain, an expense of the homeowner. Therefore, the total cost to the County should be minimal.

Finally, we have heard some County staff use the argument that some systems may be beyond repair; therefore, there is a risk that people would be forced out of their homes. Our research indicates that few, very few, systems are irreparable. For those systems that appear to be “unfixable,” there are new technologies, e.g. anaerobic systems and systems engineered for poor soil, limited acreage, and rocky terrain. The NYS Department of Health has been slow to approve these new technologies, despite the recommendations of a committee convened years ago to review new technologies. There are many alternatives to condemnation. Failing septic systems affect not just the single homeowner but also the wider community. Building codes keep people from living in substandard houses; septic regulations will keep people from polluting the groundwater, which knows no boundaries.

Once a failing system is identified and remediation found, how can the repairs be made in hardship cases?

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VISIT THE UNITED NATIONS

with the League of Women Voters of New Castle

Thursday, November 6, 2008

Briefing and Lunch
10:30am-1:15pm

Join us for a special League of Women Voters visit to the United Nations. It will take place on

Thursday, November 6th, from 10:30am to 1:15pm.
We'll begin with a briefing on a topic of the day,
and continue with lunch in the Delegates' Dining Room.

This is an extraordinary opportunity. Briefings are not open to the general public, and the Delegates' Dining Room is a real treat, with delicious food and sweeping views of the East River.

We are currently working with the UN to finalize the topic of the briefing. More information will be posted on our website (www.lwvnewcastle.org) as it becomes available. Briefing materials will be sent to registrants prior to the event, and those who are interested can join us on Metro-North to travel into NYC.



Cost is \$30pp for League members and \$35pp for nonmembers.

Use the reservation form below,
and mail a check payable to LWV of New Castle to:
LWV New Castle, P.O. Box 364, Chappaqua, NY 10514

For more information contact Mary at 666-3536 or Sheila at 238-8994

Register for LWV Visit to the United Nations
\$30pp for League members; \$35pp for nonmembers
Mail to LWV New Castle P.O. Box 364 Chappaqua, NY 10514

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-Mail: _____

Amount Enclosed _____

Are You Drinking Your Neighbor's Sewage?

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Homeowners can get low interest loans to repair failing systems from the NY State Clean Drinking Water Revolving Fund. The County can also set up its own low interest loan program. Just how many public versus private funds are used to clean up a source of pollution is a work in progress. One approach used successfully in Connecticut involves the County doing the repairs and placing an assessment against the property. The County would be repaid upon sale. Another option is a grant program. Possibilities exist and need to be explored.

Summary

The issue of a Septic Management Plan has never been more timely. In 2006, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation issued Modifications for MS4's (municipal separate stormwater sewer system) in the East of Hudson Watershed for the Required Stormwater Management Program. The modifications call for:

1. public education and outreach on stormwater impacts, including septic systems;
2. a requirement to develop, implement and enforce a program to ensure that onsite wastewater treatment (septic) systems are inspected and, where necessary, maintained or rehabilitated at a minimum frequency of once every three years. Program development includes the establishment of the necessary legal authority to implement the program.

This means that every town, including New Castle, must have a septic management plan in place by 2009 for most of its septic systems — neither an insignificant nor inexpensive undertaking.

2008/2009 Membership

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEW CASTLE

PO BOX 364, Chappaqua, NY 10514

Membership Dues: to June 30, 2009

Individual \$55; Family \$80; Student \$21

Check payable to LWV of New Castle

I enclose for membership \$ _____

I am adding a tax-deductible contribution
to the LWVNC Citizen Education Fund \$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

I would like to work on:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| __ Local Issues | __ Environment |
| __ State/National Issues | __ Voter Service |
| __ Schools | __ TV Production |
| __ Call me to discuss what I can do | __ Observe Public Meetings |

__ I cannot be active at this time, but I want to support LWV goals with my membership.

Sept./Oct. 2008

Based upon the above information the League strongly advocates for the County rather than each of the 45 municipalities to implement an education and management plan that will have uniform standards, a central database, and enforcement ability. To repeat — this is a public health issue.

*LWV of New Castle
Environment Committee
LWV of Westchester
Environment Committee*

Help LWV Go Green!

Help us save postage and paper by sending us your e-mail address.

You'll receive LWV New Castle e-mails on events, meetings and news of interest.

Send your e-mail to:
lwvnewcastle@optonline.net



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF NEW CASTLE**
P.O. BOX 364
CHAPPAQUA, NY 10514

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www.lwvnewcastle.org
lwvnewcastle@optonline.net

CALENDAR

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Saturday, Sept. 27th 11am-4pm | Community Day Train Station |
| Friday, Oct. 10th | Voter Registration Deadline (see p. 3) |
| Tuesday, Oct. 14th 7:45pm | Town Board New Castle Town Hall |
| Tuesday, Oct. 14th 8:15pm | CCSD Board of Education Horace Greeley |
| Wednesday, Oct. 15th 9:30am | LWV Board Meeting Home of Joanne Knight 90 Smith St., Chappaqua |
| Tuesday, Oct 21st 7:30pm | Library Board Chappaqua Library |
| Wednesday, Oct. 22nd 7:30pm | Candidates' Night Chappaqua Library (see p.3) |
| Tuesday, Oct. 28th | Absentee ballot request deadline (see p. 3) |
| Tuesday, Oct. 28th 7:45pm | Town Board New Castle Town Hall |
| Tuesday, Oct. 28th 8:15pm | CCSD Board of Education Horace Greeley |

COMMUNITY DAY

Sat., Sept. 27th
Chappaqua Train Station
11:00am-4:00pm

Join the fun at the Chappaqua Train Station as New Castle turns out to celebrate Community Day. Bring your friends to the League of Women Voters booth and help them learn more about our activities and programs. Voter registration forms will be available!

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