

January 2003

# Environmental Update



Onslow County Center  
4024 Richlands Hwy.  
Jacksonville, NC 28540  
(910) 455-5873  
Fax (910) 455-0977  
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/onslow>



---

## Welcome to a bright new year!

---

Did you make any New Year's resolutions? Did any of them include improvements in your "environmental behavior"? This could include:

**Recycling** - Many areas collect paper, cans, and plastic. Automotive centers will take used motor oil and car batteries. Some stores will take regular batteries (AA, AAA, 9 volt, etc.). You can also recycle at home! Start a compost pile. Or, get a paper shredder and turn all that junk mail into mulch.

**Energy conservation** - Turn the thermostat down a degree or two; wear sweaters and turn it down even more!! Turn off lights that aren't being used. Switch to compact fluorescent lamp bulbs.



**Water conservation** - This doesn't just have to be done during the middle of a summer drought! Water tables are dropping and many municipalities are required to reduce water use and look for alternative sources. The "cheap" sources (high quality, low treatment requirement) were, of course, used first. So, that means the alternatives will likely cost more. How much more? That depends on what has to be done to the water. Is the water too "hard"? Does it have too much iron? Does it have an odor

(hydrogen sulfide?)? Does it have too much color?

Color and odor fall under the category of "aesthetics". There are drinking water treatment limits placed on them, but not for health reasons. Instead, the limits try to ensure that the public isn't offended by how the water looks or smells. The water may be perfectly healthful, but folks won't drink it (and they WILL complain!!) if they don't trust it.

How much does your water currently cost? What other commodity are you able to get so much of for so little cost? Milk? No. Gas? No. Do you ignore the drips and leaks with the thought that they are too much trouble to fix or don't add up to much anyway?

What does bottled water cost in local stores (specialty brands or "the cheap stuff")? At 60 gallons per person per day, how much would that cost a family of four for one month, if they used that as their sole supply? How much does a water service cost (either in-home treatment device or delivered jugs)?

Are water rates rising in your community? When was the last time they were raised? What is the current rate? What is the proposed rate? WHY is the rate being changed: Treatment getting more expensive? New (more expensive) regulations? New sources have to be developed? New or upgraded treatment facilities are needed? Larger population requires larger facility and/or larger distribution system? These are all typical reasons for increased rates.

Did you get this newsletter from someone else? Great! However, you CAN sign up for your own copy:

---

## Did you get this newsletter from someone else? Great! However, you CAN sign up for your own copy:

---

Fill out this form and mail to:

North Carolina Cooperative Extension  
Onslow County Multipurpose Complex  
4024 Richlands Hwy.  
Jacksonville NC 28540

**Comment:** Please add me to the 2003 *Environmental Update* mailing list.

This newsletter is also available on-line at:  
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/onslow/staff/drashash/newsletr/>

Please print legibly!

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

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
(required!!)

---

## What is the source of your water?

---

Water on this planet is NOT equally divided! The vast majority (97.2%) of our water exists as salt water. Freshwater is the remaining 2.8%; however, that is also unevenly divided to different locations:

icecaps and glaciers:	2.38%
groundwater:	0.39 %
surface water (lakes, rivers, etc.):	0.029%

Here in watery, swampy, GREEN eastern North Carolina, it is hard to believe that there is so little fresh groundwater and surface water. Start believing! The rest of North Carolina has joined many other sections of the country in experiencing shortages and restrictions. This past summer saw restrictions hit the coast. Yes, fresh water is a finite resource! Ask Dare County. They have been using desalination for brackish (semi-salty) wells for many years.

Wells are very popular in eastern North Carolina. All of the residents in Onslow County are on well water. This is true of private and municipal supplies. Why wells? Onslow is unique for a coastal county in that no water enters the county from any other county. The New River (the eastern-New as opposed to the New River in Ashe County that flows north into Virginia and is actually one of the oldest rivers on earth) starts and ends in Onslow. North of Jacksonville it is a fairly small river, south of Jacksonville it is an estuary.

Until now, wells in Onslow could provide sufficient good quality water that needed little additional treatment. Using the river would have cost more. The options, however, are changing. Population increases and aquifer depletions have resulted in mandatory changes in where the water is obtained. This is true in other areas of the state as well. So, where DOES your water come from?

---

## Winter and septic systems: not always a good combination!

---

Septic system problems typically show up during the winter months. Why? Because that is the time of year when the groundwater table is higher for longer periods of time. Why is the groundwater table higher? Trees are dormant, so they aren't actively using the water (evapotranspiration). Also, cooler temperatures result in less evaporation.

Has your septic tank been pumped during the last 3-5 years? If you don't use a garbage disposal or use the toilets as a trashcan (cigarettes, etc.), you can probably wait 5 years between pumpings. If you DO use a garbage disposal and send other unnecessary items to the septic system, the pumpings should be more frequent. Pumping the tank removes settled solids and floating grease from the system PRIOR TO their reaching the drainfield. These materials can lead to drainfield clogging and system failure.

Which, by the way, gets us back to why folks have more problems during the winter months: the watertable is higher and any clogging or compaction in the drainfield just makes the situation worse. Also, leaves and other debris blocking ditches can cause the water to back up; again adding to the problem.

This is a good time to check that ditches are free-flowing. If part of a DOT right-of-way, NC DOT is usually responsible for the ditch. If the ditch is on private property, the owner is responsible. THIS INCLUDES DRAINAGE EASEMENTS, which are usually created to prevent buildings and other alterations from impeding water flow.

Sincerely,

*Diana M.C. Rashash*

Diana M.C. Rashash, PhD  
Extension Area Specialized Agent  
Natural Resources-Environmental Education  
[diana\\_rashash@ncsu.edu](mailto:diana_rashash@ncsu.edu)

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY  
ONSLow COUNTY  
4024 RICHLANDS HWY.  
JACKSONVILLE, NC 28540

-----  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS