

An overview of programs across the state  
Kae Arrington,  
NCDENR-OSWW

Half of NC's homes use on-site wastewater systems. Authorized agents of the State employed by local health departments perform site evaluations, system design, and system installation inspections. The Program Improvement Team was formed to improve quality and promote consistency and efficiency in North Carolina's on-site wastewater programs. Correct and consistent application of the on-site wastewater laws and rules by the local agents is assured through review, feedback, and follow-up. The Team visits each county and evaluates the performance of their staff, the procedures used to implement state rules and laws, their record keeping system, and the adequacy of staff for the existing workload. The policies and procedures that the local program follows when accepting applications, conducting site evaluations, issuing and denying permits, and inspecting system installations are reviewed. Forms and applications are reviewed for compliance with rules and statutes. Office and field review of work generated by staff members working in the on-site wastewater program is performed to assess their knowledge and skill with implementation of the NC Sewage Laws and Rules. Once the initial review is complete, action plans are developed jointly with each county to bring about necessary improvements. Follow up is provided to track and assist with implementation of the recommendations.

We began our reviews in mid-December 1998. We have completed reviews in 71 counties, reviewing over 2000 permit packages, visiting over 1100 permitted sites, and observing 600+ system installation inspections. In our reviews, we found system design to be consistent with soil and site conditions 91% of the time. The major cause of improper design (57%) was assigned long term acceptance rates set too high (resulting in undersized septic systems). Eighty percent of the required documentation on permits, forms, and site evaluation sheets was found. During system installations inspections, 94% of the items required for compliance were verified by the local staff.