

OPINION

VIEWPOINT | Environmental Health is here for the public

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By **MARIBETH CRANDELL**

Living on Whidbey Island for over 20 years, I've had the opportunity to work with a lot of great organizations including the Whidbey Institute, Whidbey Watershed Stewards, Fort Casey State Park and as Environmental Educator for the City of Oak Harbor. Now I work for Island County's Environmental Health Department, and serve as an active member of Whidbey ECO Network. I believe that by pooling our expertise and resources we're able to work more effectively to protect Whidbey's water quality.



My co-workers at the Environmental Health Department inspect schools, pools, mobile home parks, septic systems, wells, restaurants and recycling centers. We monitor surface water, groundwater and saltwater quality. Part of my job is to collect water samples at popular swimming lakes and beaches and get them tested for contaminants and other health hazards.

In Island County, roughly 70 percent of homes depend upon septic systems for wastewater treatment, and 70 percent are dependent on clean well water. Many people have moved here from places where they were on a city sewer system. Septic systems need special attention. We offer septic education programs in order to protect our water, beaches, shellfish and public health.

I work closely with the Whidbey Island Conservation District, offering a series of classes to help homeowners understand and care for their septic systems. It's not a very appealing topic, but in Island County it's essential. I coordinate the classes and teach the basic Septic 101 class. Rob Hallbauer, from the conservation district, teaches Septic 201. Rob is a licensed septic designer. I really appreciate his level of expertise and his professional but relaxed teaching style.

Septic 101 is offered for free to teach people how to live with their septic system in a way that helps ensure that it works effectively for as long as possible. Septic 201 classes teach people how to comprehensively inspect their system. If you have a conventional gravity or pressure system, you could get certified to inspect your own system. Both of these classes are taught online and in person.

For those with an alternative system like a mound, sand filter, Glendon or aerobic treatment unit, you can attend our new free Alternative Septic System Class. This class is offered for education, not certification. Register online for these classes on Sept. 14 in Bayview, Oct. 3 in Coupeville, and Oct. 8 in Oak Harbor. Alternative Systems require an annual inspection by a licensed maintenance service provider.

Inspections, like a tune-up for your car, help catch any problems before they become expensive repairs or a septic system failure. State and local laws require a septic inspection every one to three years depending on the type of system.

If you live in the Penn Cove Watershed, we have a rebate program that may cover the cost of your inspection. It is available through 2015 while supplies last. If, during your inspection, you discover the system has problems, we have grants and loans for repairs or replacement.

To register for a septic class, get a list of septic system professionals or get information on financial assistance or Rebate Programs visit www.islandcountyseptictraining.com or call 360-679-7350.

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