

Revisions to DEP's septage rules for treatment facilities

DEP is in the process of updating Chapter 555 of its rules, "Standards for the Addition of Septage to Wastewater Treatment Facilities. Last amended in 1989, this rule has been largely applicable to municipal treatment facilities that want to accept trucked-in wastes from septic tanks, cesspools and other similar sources. While the rule is not regarded as seriously "broken" some facilities want to accept more volumes of wastes than the rule presently allows, and since the rule has not been revised in nearly 20 years, this is a good opportunity for the Department to review and update it. Chapter 555 now limits the amount of septage that can be received to not more than 1% of a treatment plant's design flow.

In preparation for rule making, the Department has convened an advisory group and conducted a survey of treatment plants currently receiving septage. Some 30 facilities responded to DEP's survey, with 70% reporting that the demand for septage disposal at their facilities as stable. Another 17% did anticipate an increasing demand. Most thought that increasing the allowance to 2% of the of the facility's design capacity would be sufficient to meet future needs.

Some facilities have experienced problems with odors, traffic sludge quality and process control upsets. Septic tank wastes, or other types of trucked-in wastes for that matter, can be very high strength and potentially cause these or other problems if not handled carefully. Additionally, high-strength wastes can quickly eat up plant capacities for treatment, holding or solids handling.

After meetings with the advisory group and other interested parties, DEP is preparing a revised Chapter 555 that will ultimately be considered by the Board of Environmental Protection as a replacement for the existing rule. Some of the more significant changes under consideration include the following.

- *The scope is changed to include all trucked wastes, not just septage. This would bring all wastes with characteristics significantly different than a facility's normal influent under the rule. It is recognized that some non-municipal plants may receive trucked wastes.

- *New definitions are added for "transported wastes" to replace "septage" and for "side stream treatment". Side stream treatment management methods are important alternatives to adding wastes directly into a facility's influent flow and include holding tanks, chemical conditioning or solids dewatering systems.

- *The proposal would prohibit receipt of transported wastes in certain plants that categorically would be impacted by high-strength wastes. Such plants are those with a capacity of less than 0.1 mgd; those with only primary treatment (the "301(h)" plants); and those with alternate to secondary effluent limits.

*The criteria for approval are changed to place more focus on pollutant loadings. In doing this, a rebuttable presumption for waste strengths and three levels for approval are proposed. These levels are less than 0.5% of design capacity without any side stream treatment; up to 1.0% when some side stream treatment is used; and over 1.0% of capacity. The upper tier is a case by case evaluation rather than a fixed amount. For this tier, more detailed application materials would be needed and there would be greater technical review.

*The criteria for addition of wastes are expanded and more detailed. Most of the items are from the old rule or standard license conditions.

Preliminary information on the Department's proposals can be found on the web site at www.maine.gov/dep/blwq/rule.htm or by contacting Dennis Merrill at 287-7788.

The Department hopes to submit the proposed rule to the BEP in October, with a recommendation that a public hear be scheduled, probably in November. As the rulemaking process begins, more information will be available on the Board's web site at www.maine.gov/dep/bep.