

NORTHWEST LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION GROUP

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Dear Committee on Energy and Environmental Policy:

I am writing to strongly encourage you to take steps to restore funding for the Local Environmental Protection Program (LEPP). This program directly serves Kansans throughout the state, and it makes an incredible difference in northwest Kansas. The following information provides an overview on the LEPP and our region.

The Northwest Local Environmental Protection Group formed in 1990, and we started testing water in 1991. Over the past twenty years, we accomplished the following in partnership with the state (statistics are from 1991 to Nov. 9, 2012):

- Wells tested: 3,802
- Bacteria in wells: 809
- E-Coli in wells: 58
- Nitrates in wells greater than 10 ppm: 376

Additionally, we have built a database of 3,854 wastewater systems, and 2,884 are now code approved. There are around 50% of rural homes in our 15 counties that have cesspools, which are allowed until they fail. Our office serves as the safeguard for the Kansas water system, and we are losing the resources to act.

We already cut an employee last December in preparation for the Governor's funding cut. Despite this, we still cover 15 northwest Kansas counties, which is approximately 14,000 square miles. There currently are two of us in the office to cover this area. We have met with our counties and the majority feels the State started this program so they should not have to fund it all out of their budget. We do charge fees, and we had one county drop out of our 16 original county group due because they didn't approve of us charging higher fees to help keep the program going. So they dumped it on their local health department and the weed department, and neither of them knew anything about wastewater systems. The county no longer offers water testing in their county, as they don't have the equipment.

We have had counties say if our LEPP staff isn't here to enforce the code, then they won't worry about it. Our concern is over the past 22 years, we have come a long way in educating and getting folks to try and do the right thing to keep their environment safe, and without us these counties out here will digress back to old ways of running sewage out on the ground or into the creeks. We still have a lot of old cesspools in our area, and some folks don't see the harm in having them because they have worked for 60 years, and there's no need to change something that has worked all this time. Under the state regs, they can have a cesspool until it fails, and some folks don't see why they can't dig a new one. Without state funding, we will lose all the advances we have made to keep Kansas water safe.

Though I cannot attend today's hearing, I am available through e-mail or phone to answer any questions I can about the service we provide and how important the LEPP funding is to western Kansas.

Sincerely,

Shirley Weber
NWLEPG Director

Joint Energy and Environmental
Policy Committee
November 19 and 20, 2012
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