Chesapeake Bay TMDL Stakeholder Advisory Group – Onsite/Septic Workgroup
July 26, 2010
Meeting Summary

The Onsite/Septic Workgroup met on July 26, 2010 at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's Piedmont Regional Office. This was the second of two meetings of the workgroup in advance of the August 2 meeting of the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Steering Committee.

1. Meeting Overview: The purpose of the meeting was to develop recommendations from the workgroup regarding allocations from the onsite/septic sector, to propose management strategies to address allocation and to identify any other issues that should be brought to the steering committee and by extension, the SAG.

2. Review of Scoping Scenario Results: Russ Perkinson (DCR) reviewed the results of the "scoping scenarios" that were developed by agency staff to evaluate levels of treatment and BMP implementation necessary to achieve nitrogen and phosphorus allocations by major watershed.

   For Onsite/Septic Systems, the scenarios included very aggressive levels of treatment. The "Level 2" scenario presumed that all new and replacement systems are either shallow placed pressure systems or denitrification systems (presumed 25% reduction for shallow placed systems and 50% reduction from denitrification systems from conventional systems). The "Level 3" scenario presumed that all new and replacement systems are denitrification systems at a 50% reduction. The scenarios also predicted a rate of replacement based on the presumed 50 year life of a conventional system.

   With the assistance of staff from Department of Health staff, the committee reviewed the scenarios. In general, the committee agreed that the scenarios were overly optimistic in terms of estimates of replacements of conventional systems within the Chesapeake Bay watershed and therefore the members were not convinced that the level 2 and 3 scenarios were realistic.

3. Discussion of Allocations and Cost-effective means of Maintaining Allocations: The committee agreed that it is unlikely that total reductions can be achieved in this sector without the untenable step of requiring removal of existing conventional systems and the installations of nitrogen reducing systems. The best hope is to reduce the rate of increase in loads from onsite systems over time as conventional systems are replaced and new systems are installed.

   Therefore, the committee recommendations were as follows:

   a. Establish the total nitrogen allocation at the 2009 progress level: 2.63 million pounds.

b. Establish the ability to offset future loads through an expansion of the existing nutrient credit exchange program

c. Consider strategies to reduce the rate of increase in septic loads including:

1. Requiring new or replacement systems in near shore areas (perhaps Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act RMAs and RPAs to be nitrogen reducing.)

2. Establish an "in lieu" fund with a fee on systems to generate revenue for the purchase of offsets or the establishment of practices to offset loads from new systems.

3. Establish a tax credit to offset the expense of replacing conventional systems with those that reduce nitrogen.

4. Encourage use of community sized systems instead of systems on individual lots.

5. If a fee similar to a stormwater utility fee is established, determine a method for giving "credit" for nitrogen reducing replacement systems.

6. Ensure any programs recognize the potential financial burden on homeowners, particularly those of low and moderate incomes.

7. Ensure that local government have the flexibility to determine cost effective approaches in this sector.