

THE

LITTLE DIGGER

MINNESOTA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

A Quarterly Publication

Summer 2026 - Vol. 41, Issue 2

July 31st Soils Seminar in Milaca Is All About the Importance of Soils CE

By Dan Wheeler, University of Minnesota – Onsite Sewage Treatment Program



In case you're saying, "I've been to a site like this before" or "This soil again!" Here's a reminder about why the Soils CE is important.

We know! We might have been there before too! So why would a wastewater professional be required to keep attending continuing education? For this article we will focus on just soils, but many of the statements will apply to wastewater continuing education more broadly. The bottom line is that there is always more to learn.

Just a couple of learning opportunities are listed here (there are many more!):

1. Soil identification and description practice as well as adaptation.

In a climate like Minnesota where we go months without texturing or coloring a soil, it is good to practice proper techniques and compare our results with others and instructors. This is true for soil color, soil textures, soil structure, etc. In addition, some of us have had changes to our physical bodies over time (e.g. stronger or weaker, hand surgery, eye sight changes...). There are many ways to identify a soil, not all are accurate. We learn how we can adapt our process to still do good work in the pits.

2. New information or new understanding.

Just like everything else these days, soils information is changing. UM is conducting research on soils and watertables, the soil survey is talking about big changes, there is a soil color meter, AI (sorry just had to put that in here – and we have discussed a bit about this at Soils CE lately). Maybe

it is just good old fashioned knowledge about calcium carbonates as indicators of long term water movement in soil. Whatever the site and soil may be, we go into a lot of details to enhance our professional understanding of landscapes and soils all across Minnesota.

3. Soil observation log details. Perhaps there is something on the form that you do not ever see or just never fill out. This is a perfect opportunity to ask about it! We can explain and discuss all the reasons. Some of these discussions have led to changes in forms before...

4. A new soil region. Sure there are advantages to attending a Soils CE in your area of MN. But have you ever wondered what a soil looks like under a giant windmill? Or what could possibly be wrong with a soil that is deposited from huffed and puffed silts? Your certification(s) allow you to work statewide, so perhaps gaining some new knowledge from a new soils region could open up other opportunities. Heck you might even make some new friends!

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Minnesota's wastewater industry is truly special and successful. We have septic professionals across this state that understand everything about water, uses, design, maintenance, installation, materials, sites, soils, etc. Let's keep that going! See you in Milaca on July 31st!

STILL OPENINGS IN 2026 SUMMER SOILS SEMINAR! REGISTER AT <https://mowa-mn.com/soils-seminar/>

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A Message from the MOWA President

MOWA Board Keeps Momentum Going

MOWA members,

I hope everyone is busy, with plenty of work ahead of them to make 2026 a great year. This industry moves at such a crazy pace as soon as the road restrictions are lifted, that we sometimes forget to take a moment and realize that what we do within the on-site industry is extremely important work.....as a matter of fact, we are the industry that strives to give families the best possible way to manage their household waste stream. Our designers, inspectors, installers, regulators, maintenance providers, service providers and office staff are the best at what they do, and each and every one of you deserves a BIG thank you for your efforts. The results of your hard work, leave a positive lasting impression within your community.....and you can be proud of the fact that you are providing families with a safe and clean environment to raise their families, live their lives and enjoy the great Minnesota outdoors.

As I write this column, we are coming into some extremely hot and humid weather. The summer heat can affect each person differently, so please be careful when out in the extreme weather.

***Safety in this upcoming weather is so critical!
Strive to make safety a daily goal...no matter what
the weather is throwing at us! Let's get everyone home safe.***

The MOWA board has been diligently working on many topics, to include:

- the 2026 soils class that will be held in Milaca and hosted by Septic Check... thank you Septic Check for your efforts
- the 2027 Winter Convention
- several task forces that deal directly with issues facing our industry:
 - a) land spreading of septage
 - b) mentorship of individuals that are entering the onsite industry
- MOMA + dealing with the requirements and responsibilities of service providers

Your MOWA Board is very invested in seeing our industry grow and to help provide the "tools" you need to do your job to the best of your ability.

Being on the Board is a great way to meet new people and help shape the direction of our industry.... For anyone interested in joining the Board or just curious about the potential of joining the Board, please feel free to reach out by phone or stop and chat at the winter convention.....it's always fun to see who might be thinking about "throwing their hat in the ring".

I'm going to end this letter by saying that I want everyone to stay busy, stay safe, enjoy your summer and I, as well as all the board members, look forward to seeing you soon.

Keith Valento, President of MOWA

This is a quarterly publication of the Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association.

Editor: Tammy Trantham, Email: executivedirector@mowa-mn.com

The articles printed in the publication do not necessarily reflect the opinion of this organization. Readers are encouraged to respond to the articles with their own points-of-view. We welcome industry-related comments or articles. Information or inquiries should be sent or made to any of the following:

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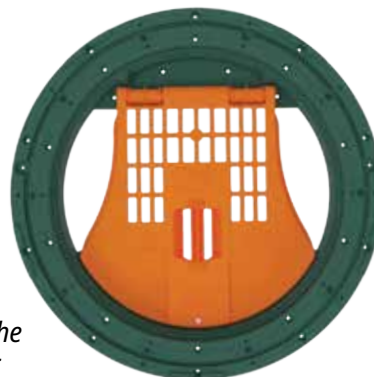
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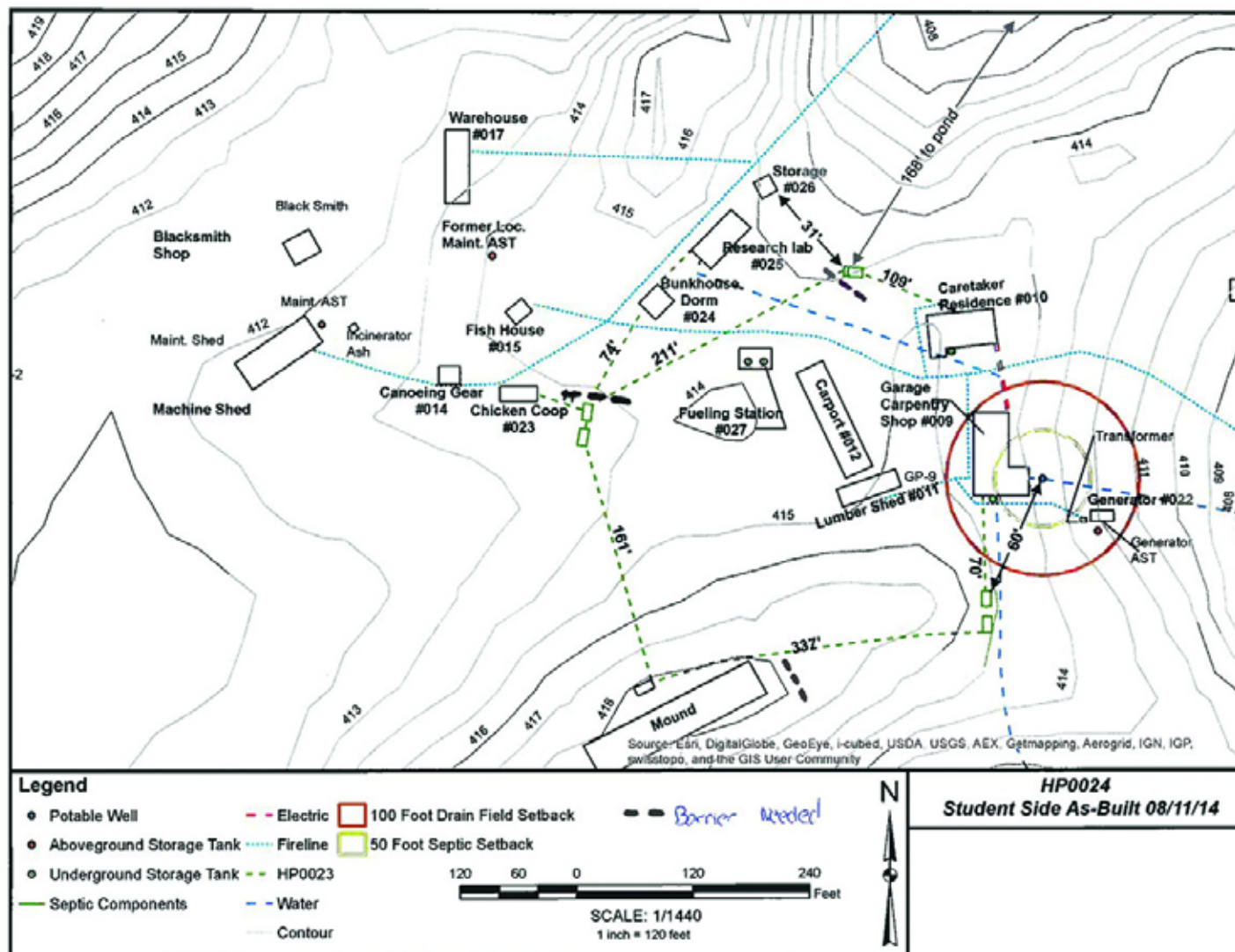


Septic Documentation Is a Necessary Safeguard

Documenting Septic Installations

Assembling as-builts with a log of photos is a courtesy to your customers and the best way to help your business with follow-up visits

By Sara Heger, Ph.D., University of Minnesota OSTP



The line of treatment tanks for the Farmhouse Culture sauerkraut factory in Watsonville, California, sits beside the large building where cabbage is processed. The full system consists of five tanks and almost 13,000 linear feet of Geoflow drip tubing. (Photos provided by Sara Heger)

After any system has been constructed, installers must typically complete an as-built to submit to the local government. Even when not required, it is good practice to provide documentation for your company and the owner.

An as-built is the drawing and documentation specifying the final in-place location, elevation, size and type of all system components. These records identify the results of materials testing, describe conditions during construction and indicate that completed work was in accordance with applicable requirements.

As-built maps and specifications are useful for future homeowners, service technicians and health departments because they remove the guesswork during routine service work, repairs or landscaping. They can be used by the pumper if the lids become buried over time to locate the tanks and can also be useful during home sales as a copy of the as-built is included in the closing documents. Drawings are also useful to help property owners from accidentally building a deck, shed or pool over the system.

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Septic Documentation , Continued from Page 5**Contents**

As applicable, an as-built should contain:

- Location and elevations of the outlet from the house
- Location and elevation of the septic tank(s) and dosing tank
- Location and elevation of the manhole on the septic tank
- Location and elevation of additional pretreatment components
- Panel brand/characteristics
- Pump total dynamic head and gpm
- Location of the soil treatment area
- Details of imported treatment media
- Details of distribution media
- Location and elevation of the gravity or pressure distribution system with the location of access points for O&M being critical
- Elevation of the top and bottom of the distribution media
- Elevation and characteristics of the final cover material
- Location of all access points: risers and lids, clean-outs

The map must have at least two measurements from fixed points (like the corner of the house, a foundation wall or a permanent well casing) to each component so they can be found years down the road. Other critical aspects to include are a north arrow, slope direction and the reserve area (if applicable).

More than just drawings

A camera should be used as part of an installer's as-built documentation. These photographs may be valuable in the future, in case there is a question about the proper siting or construction of the system.

Take pictures of the construction site as a whole. Begin by taking photos before construction begins, so that an overall view of the site will be available. Next, photograph the site after the vegetation has been cleared. Be sure to include any trees (before and after), highlighting that they were cut off and not grubbed. If a soil pit or boring is evaluated during construction of the system, photos should be taken, including tape measures alongside the soil to indicate where the limiting condition was identified.

During the installation a critical photograph is of the building sewer from the house to the first component, typically the septic tank. This should include the placement of the building sewer, the connection to the house, the clean-out location, the connection to the tank and the type of pipe used for the connection. The tanks are typically the next in line, so documenting the location of the tanks along with the bedding



Part of documenting a job correctly is using photos. Capturing images is easy to do with phones these days and should include the entire installation from start to finish and even the equipment used.

material, depth of installation, capacity of tank(s), risers, connection points of risers to the tanks, tank lids, backfill and cover materials and final grade.

If a dosing chamber is part of the system-critical aspects to document with a photo include:

- Wiring
- Control panel
- Connection of the pipe to the pump
- Wiring of the floats
- Entire setup before placing it into the tank
- Method to lift the pump off the bottom
- Pump in place, to record-keep its in the tank

Your next set of photographs should depict the site preparation of the STA. These photos should include the staking, but more importantly, should show the site after the soil interface has been roughened. With all STAs, we want the natural soil structure to be exposed so documenting that the sidewalls and bottom of the system were not smeared or compacted is a critical item to document. Make sure pictures of this portion of the construction include the equipment actively engaging in work.

Don't forget

Easy things to overlook that should also be documented with photos are materials that are used as part of the installation

Septic Documentation , Continued on Page 7

Septic Documentation , Continued from Page 6

such as clean sand or rock. Take a picture of the sand itself and include a photo of the jar test if it has been run. Photograph the placement of the media and include the equipment used for placing it. Your photos should show the depth of the media and how it was placed. If rock is used, a close-up of the rock with reference for scale should be taken to show the size and quality. Photograph the placement of the distribution media and laterals. Documenting the glue process and orifices is also a good practice for documentation.

Were there any unusual or special considerations on the site? If so, photograph them. These may include tile drainage, special sloping for placements and special soil conditions. Another concern may be identifying and protecting a secondary site or trees. Photos showing setbacks, such as those from wells, buildings and property lines, may also be appropriate. If you performed any landscaping such as planting of seeds or placed erosion control measures, these should be documented.

Now you are ready to photograph the finished product. In these pictures, include how the entire area was finished. The goal is to complete a good record of the construction that can be a benefit to you and your client for years to come.

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Onsite Leadership Means Caring for Crew and Self

7 Tips for Onsite Installers to Prevent Burnout This Busy Season

Staying motivated and healthy is crucial not just for your own well-being, but for maintaining the quality and efficiency of your business



For many onsite installers, summer is a period of peak demand, which often leads to long hours and significant stress. While it's the time to maximize revenue, it's also when the risk of burnout is highest.

Staying motivated and healthy is crucial not just for your own well-being, but for maintaining the quality and efficiency of your business. As you ramp up for the busiest part of the year, we've rounded up essential reading to help you and your team manage the pressure, maintain a healthy work-life balance and prevent burnout from derailing your success.

1. Some business owners find it difficult to give up complete control and start delegating to employees, but the fastest way to burn out is trying to do everything yourself. To save your sanity, identify the team members you can trust to handle big jobs or new responsibilities without a ton of oversight.

Read more: [8 Ways for Stressed-Out Business Owners to Cope](#)

2. The other septic company across town probably first comes to mind when you think of your competition, but in reality... your real competition is you. We all get in our own way now and then. Business is complicated, and it's always easier to see where we went off the rails after the fact. But there are also some very common places where we tend to compete with ourselves, self-erecting the roadblocks to our own success, over and over, without really considering what we're doing.

Read more: [Stop Being the Roadblock to Your Own Business Success](#)

3. Business owners know the feeling of burnout all too well, but it's important to be aware that employees will experience it, too. Not only is this a significant mental health issue, but it can impact your team's dynamics and your bottom line as well. Employees who are burned out may take more sick days, make more sloppy mistakes or just generally be less engaged and productive. Here's how to notice signs of burnout in your team, and some basic steps to prevent burnout from occurring.

Read more: [Recognizing the Signs of Employee Burnout](#)

4. Being busy has become a badge of honor in the workplace, but working constantly doesn't necessarily equate to progress and success. Stressed owners or workers may produce subpar projects, fail to meet deadlines or place the business under a threat of liability. Being busy brings in revenue, but if the amount of jobs you're taking on causes your quality of work to go down, profits will start to suffer in the long run. Assess whether you're on a sustainable path, and solve the "busy" problem.

Read more: [How Being Too Busy Can Be Bad Business](#)

5. Business owners sometimes feel like they need to be all things to all people. They agree to do more than they should and wind up being stretched too thin. You can't do everything, so sometimes you have to say no to one thing in order to say yes to something more important. It's imperative that you realize the importance of being judicious with your time and your attention. One of the most valuable skills a business owner can develop is learning when and how to say no.

Read more: [Learning to Say 'No' Can Grow Your Bottom Line](#)

6. Being a septic services professional can be a thankless job. You're often called upon in emergencies when people aren't in the best of spirits. As a result, you don't typically get the customer's best moments, and you aren't always shown the level of respect you deserve. Over time, that can be taxing and can leave you feeling unfulfilled, unappreciated and burnt out. But you're expected to consistently show up smiling and ready to help. Here's what you can do to recharge yourself and bring joy back into the job.

Read more: [How Burnt-Out Installers Can Enjoy Working Again](#)

7. In order to stave off premature burnout and exhaustion, it's critical to take some time off every now and then. Simply exiting the office for a week isn't enough; it's important to actually disconnect and give yourself a true break. This can be easier said than done, of course, as small-business owners typically devote every waking hour to ensuring their team is operating at peak efficiency. Planning a vacation is just the first step. To truly disconnect, tie up any loose ends before you leave, and consider these other practical strategies.

Read more: [8 Ways for Business Owners to Truly Disconnect During a Vacation](#)

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Many Thanks to the Online Installer for the links to several helpful articles that may be useful to MOWA professionals.



Consumer Education Is an Industry Goal

MOWA To Partner with U of MN OSTP for Septic Smart Week Webinar!

MOWA is promoting a free webinar for homeowners to join during Septic Smart Week to learn about their SSTs. We hope that you and your business will help us promote this event and get the word out about registration. The goal is to help homeowners understand the importance of maintaining their systems and how they work. We will have experts on the webinar to answer any of their questions.

When: September 15, 2026

Time: 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM

How: Webinar through Zoom

Registration Information can be found here:

<https://mowa-mn.com/septic-smart/>

There is also a link on that website to take you to EPA's website. You can download all sorts of information or items to help your business promote Septic Smart Week on social media.



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Technical Talk—Junction Box and Outlet Tips

The Secret to Keeping Electrical Connection Boxes Functioning

I recently saw a question posed online by a homeowner who had opened the door of an electrical connection box on their dose tank and asked, how did this box cause my pump to stop working?

In Wisconsin, the code requires that our electrical connections are not made inside of a riser, but outside of the riser in a watertight junction box. This junction box must be "all-weather" to protect the connections from moisture. Typically the hole in the riser that the cords run through gets sealed to prevent the moisture from the dose tank from following the cords into the box.

Several responses to the person who posted the question were correct: There was merely a loose wire in the box that shorted out the pump. Once the wire was properly connected, the pump ran fine. But did anyone mention or even notice the label that was clearly photographed on the inside of the open door of the junction box in question? The label clearly said that the box was designed for pumps up to 15 amps. What was the amperage of the pump connected in this junction box?

There was a time when I constantly had the outlet in junction boxes melting and burning out the brand-new pump and float switches. After a while we came to the conclusion that this

occurred when we used a specific 1/2-horsepower, 110-volt pump. Reaching out to the vendor who made the junction boxes, we found out the outlet in the box was not capable of handling that size pump. We kindly asked them to increase the amperage capacity of the outlet in their boxes, which they did and everything eventually worked out. So make certain that the junction box you are using is designed and manufactured for the pump you are using.

There are a lot of options for junction boxes now. For onsite systems, we are not always able to just use LB type boxes for the electrical connections. The typical small, square junction box can get broken off or cracked when hit by a lawn mower. And we know they all get hit by a lawnmower. If it cracks or breaks and is no longer weathertight, corrosion happens which does burn out pumps and float switches.

Although anecdotal, I've seen enough times that if the junction box gets buried (even with the top flush at ground surface) corrosion seems to happen faster inside the box than if it's above grade. The other thing I keep finding on buried junction boxes are surprises, like being filled with mud, when you open one.

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Memberships are based on calendar year - After July 1st, new members pay \$140-individual / \$190-business or gov't groups for remainder of 2026

Individual/Group Contact: This person will be listed as the NOWRA member on the Septic Locator website. They will be listed first in all MOWA publications. Please print clearly.

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(Please list additional business/government group members on separate sheet with complete contact information.)

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