

NOWRA Makes Progress in Efforts to Gain Greater Congressional Support for the Onsite Wastewater Industry

NOWRA's Legislative Fly-In results in the achievement of a key goal – establishment of a Congressional Decentralized Wastewater Caucus

More than a dozen NOWRA members traveled to Washington, DC June 14-15, 2016 to participate in the association's Legislative Fly-In, and made significant progress in advancing its advocacy goals. The most significant achievement which arose from more than three dozen visits to Congressional and Federal Agency offices was *securing a bi-partisan commitment to establish a Decentralized Wastewater Caucus*. Further, two members of the influential House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment immediately committed to joining the caucus during NOWRA members' visits with them.

In addition, NOWRA learned that language which it requested be included in the House Appropriations Bill was voted out of committee and included in the legislation which goes to the full House for approval. *The language directs EPA to devote more financial and staff resources to assist the 85 million Americans who use onsite/decentralized treatment*. Also, NOWRA representatives met with officials from USDA Rural Development and *secured a commitment to help educate industry professionals about how they can assist communities to better understand the benefits of onsite/decentralized treatment when they are making wastewater infrastructure decisions*.

NOWRA is seeking to secure greater Congressional support for onsite/decentralized wastewater treatment because it offers a host of economic, environmental and public health benefits to communities around the country, but has not received adequate support from either Congress or the federal agencies which have mandates to address issues facing our industry. Among their many benefits, onsite/decentralized systems:

- Protect public health and the environment.
- Are a green technology (by any definition other than EPA).
- Replenish groundwater supplies.
- Treat water to the same levels as municipal water treatment facilities.
- Are the local, small business job creators.

For too long, NOWRA maintains that the onsite/decentralized industry has been overlooked by Congress and federal regulators. For example, in the last 30 years, municipal treatment works have received \$100 Billion in grants and loans from EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program to address wastewater treatment problems. 99.7% of that money has gone to fix sewer systems. Over that same period, funding support for onsite wastewater treatment has been less than 1% of that amount – even though onsite systems serve more than 25% of properties the country. The 85 million taxpayers served by onsite systems deserve better, as do the industry's dedicated professionals.

Our industry faces a set of challenges which is nearly identical to those faced by public wastewater utilities – aging infrastructure, compliance with new anti-pollution mandates, inconsistent regulation, economic constraints, and a need for more qualified practitioners. However, the industry has been told – repeatedly – to go it alone. NOWRA believes the intent of Congress when it passed the Clean Water Act was to ensure clean water for all Americans, not just those served by public wastewater utilities. However, for more than three decades, federal funding and policies have virtually ignored Americans served by onsite/decentralized Treatment.

The "Big Pipe" folks are well-organized, well-funded and well-known in Washington. While NOWRA takes these steps to level the playing field, its goal is to galvanize the onsite wastewater industry's help and support that will make the changes happen. The more people who contact their elected representatives to help them better understand why onsite systems matter and the impact decades of neglect have had on their constituents, the more likely the industry will be successful in getting more support and a fairer share of federal money.

A number of NOWRA members who had not previously been involved in NOWRA's lobbying efforts took the time to come to Washington to meet with their Members of Congress to share the great story we have to tell regarding the benefits and advantages of onsite/decentralized wastewater treatment and to explain to their representatives why Congress and the federal agencies need to step up and enact policies which will remove barriers which hamper our industry's ability to increase our share of the wastewater treatment market and also provide greater funding to address the challenges we face as a result of decades of government neglect.

Among the members who attended the Legislative Fly-In were: Trapper Davis of Virginia (incoming VOWRA President), Nancy Mayer of Maryland (former MOWPA board member), Jay Dolby and Jackie Cook of Delaware (Jay is a DOWRA board member), and Mark Shepard of Kansas (KSFA Board member). Those participants reported that they found their efforts rewarding and most came away believing that it is possible to change the current situation. One participant, Nancy Mayer, owner of Mayer Brothers, Inc., in Elkridge MD, put it this way "I had a great time and now 'Get' the whole lobbying thing.....and do think we can make a difference."

As NOWRA continues its lobbying and advocacy efforts we will be doing more to encourage involvement from its affiliated state organizations and from individual members.

To learn more about upcoming lobbying efforts, visit <http://www.nowra.org/advocacy>.

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About NOWRA: Founded in 1992, the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA) is the largest organization within the U.S. dedicated to educating and representing members within the onsite and decentralized industry. Our members include educators, regulators, engineers, contractors, manufacturers, suppliers, service providers, and other parties in the protection of North America's water resources and environment. All segments of the industry are represented on NOWRA's Board of Directors that provide broad perspectives to promote and sustain our industry and service to the public. NOWRA headquarters is located in Alexandria, Virginia, with local constituent groups throughout the U.S. and Canada.