

SUMMARY OF MEETING NOTES FROM INSTALLER TASK FORCE MEETINGS

1/30-2/6/2013

A list was developed of those installers who might be interested in providing feedback during the planning stage of the new installer training and voluntary certification program. The names of approximately 40 excavating contractors and companies were chosen with help from the Regional Offices and TAC committee. We contacted most on the list and invited them to attend one of four meetings. Meetings were held in 3 Regional Offices (Essex Junction, Springfield, Rutland), and at the Central Office in Montpelier on January 23 and 30, and February 5 and 6, 2013.

A total of 36 people attended the meetings. There were 22 installers, 6 DEC staff, 2 designers, and 6 vendors involved with installation. Following is a summary of the key points made at the meetings.

Voluntary vs. Mandatory – While we described our intent as developing a voluntary training program, there was much discussion on this topic. While a couple of people expressed concerns with more regulation, most felt that it should become mandatory so that there will be a way to weed out the installers with little understanding of how to install a system. They also felt that the state needs a way to pull someone's certification if they keep doing poor quality work. The attendees also brought up their concerns about being underbid by someone cutting corners with materials. We told them that, in order to make it a mandatory program, the statute would need to be changed. One designer mentioned that in NH the regulators do the inspections, and if a certified installer has 3 "no backfill" orders in a year, their license is pulled. Some liked the idea of a 3 year grace period before it goes from voluntary to mandatory.

Installer's Inspection Certification – Section 1-308, Installation Certifications, allows for installers to certify the installation was completed and tested in accordance with the permit and design. The Rules do not limit the installers from certifying the installation of any type or size system but specific permits may require the system designer to do the certification. Most of the installers do not certify the installation, and liked the perceived shared responsibility of having the designer do the inspections. Although as the discussions developed, and we said that the intent would be for the designer to be responsible for the design, and the installer be responsible for the installation, some were thinking that this would streamline the process and save the client money, but should be tied to a mandatory program (particularly the larger companies). The ability to certify installations did not seem to be a driver for developing this program. They also recommended using checklists in conjunction with certification letters, in order to confirm that certain aspects of the installation were reviewed.

Levels of Certification – We described the current program for Licensed Designers, the separation between Class A and B designers, and the exam processes for each. We discussed a similar breakdown, maybe gravity vs. mechanical or residential vs. commercial/community. A few folks wanted only 1 certification, but many thought a basic and advanced certification would be appropriate, even perhaps added levels, like the Operator program. We also discussed having a special designation as a "Green" onsite installer, to support the Lakewise and other water quality initiatives. This special training could

include stormwater LID practices, wetlands, shoreline, streambank and ditch stabilization, and natural plant restorations. An installer might attain a Basic, Basic-Green, Advanced, or Advanced-Green certification. Everyone supported education, and continuing education, although one person was concerned that there might be limited opportunities and topics for training, especially for those only interested in the basic certification.

Materials – We discussed the NH manual, the nationally-developed curriculum used for the National Association of Wastewater Technicians (NAWT) and the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) installer certification programs, the URI New England Onsite Wastewater Training Center and trainers, and using the national materials and customizing them to VT's regulations. The NH manual is older and limited but we might be able to use some of this material. The national curriculum developed by the Consortium of Institutes for Decentralized Wastewater Treatment (CIDWT.org) comes with certified trainers who put on a Train-the-Trainer event. If we invited trainers from URI and UMN (where they use the Wisconsin Mound design and have similar climate to VT), they could present the first round of training sessions, and have an extra day for training the trainers, so that we could build up the capacity to provide this training with in-state people. There was good support for this approach, provided it is customized to VT rules and excludes systems not approved in VT. The materials include PowerPoint presentation slides, and a comprehensive manual with text, schematics, and multiple checklists. A couple of people had gone through the NAWT training and exam and thought that was a great foundational training experience. They also liked the idea of allowing some reciprocity between state certifications. They also would like some hands-on training, not just classroom lectures. Some people mentioned if we published the manual, we might be able to let some people go right to taking the exams. Also on-line training, registration/renewals, and exams might be a good way to go.

Qualifications – We talked about whether to include minimum qualifications such as high school diploma, number of years of experience, etc. Currently we do not have any qualifications for licensed designers, if they can pass the exams, they get their certificate. There was not a strong opinion that minimum qualifications were necessary, and there was a concern that a very experienced installer might not qualify if they did not graduate from high school.

Exams – Everyone supported having exams – some wanted them to be incorporated into the training days so that they would not take up extra time.

Renewals – We discussed having renewals every 2 years, with half day or full day training courses reported every 2 years. Some wanted a longer time between renewals or less training time, but there seemed agreement in the concept. Besides more advanced training classes, there are many I/A technology vendors who wish to train installers on their technologies. One installer suggested that if an installer does a poor job, DEC have the ability to require them to do more training...reward the good ones by not requiring the same amount of training.

Reasons for Having a Training and Certification Program – the following are incentives for an installer being trained and certified:

1. Owners of small companies will get help in teaching new employees best practices;

2. Certified installers will receive a certificate, be included on a list that will be available on the web and in the Regional Offices;
3. Installers can advertise they have been trained and have a DEC certificate;
4. Reduce time and overall costs by certifying own installations;
5. The Lakewise program can use the Green certified installers to support improvements on properties;
6. Help homeowners find certified installers

Next Steps – There was not a strong feeling for additional meetings at this point. Everyone wants to be kept informed and is willing to provide future feedback. We told them we would be re-grouping after this first round of meetings, and will figure out our next steps. We will want to gain input from engineers, licensed designers, the TAC committee, and the rest of the regional office staff. We may be able to prepare a survey and send it to the designers. One designer said they felt a combined meeting with designers and installers would be helpful. We talked about potentially having the first round of trainings in the fall or early winter, and multiple classes next January/February.