

# State tells Nauset to clean wastewater

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Friday, September 15, 2006

**B**ees need pollen. Flowers need sun. Bacteria need nitrogen.

On the last point, not only do the bacteria found in advanced septic systems need the nitrogen in wastewater for nourishment, they require a large, constant supply.

According to Nauset Regional School Committee member Greg Lavasseur of Brewster, the lack of a steady flow into the system at Nauset Regional High School in Eastham is causing effluent with nitrogen above the state Department of Environmental Protection maximum of 25 milligrams per liter for the site.

The DEP recently sent a notice of noncompliance to the district.

"Bacteria need a steady flow at a certain concentration 24 hours a day, seven days a week," said Lavasseur, a former chairman of the district's building committee and current chairman of the budget and finance subcommittee. "Bacteria need to be happy in their own little world, and they're not happy."

When the school was renovated in the mid-1990s, Lavasseur explained that the DEP asked for an enhanced septic system that would make the effluent quality better than that of a home.

The problem, Lavasseur said, is that the state wanted a system that would handle 15,000 gallons per day, but after the school installed low-flush fixtures, the highest amount has been 5,500. The kind of waste - more liquid than solid - has also been inappropriate for proper nitrogen removal from the Bioclere system.

"There's not enough waste and right kind of waste to make it work," he said.

Of the three actions mandated by the DEP in the noncompliance notice, the district has done two - hiring engineer David Michniewicz of Coastal Engineering to evaluate the treatment facility and submitting an operations and maintenance contract with Coastal Engineering.

The district has until Oct. 2 to submit a report from Michniewicz to the DEP listing the causes for the noncompliance, recommendations to bring the facility into compliance and a schedule to do so.

Michniewicz has already sent a letter to the district with recommendations to add an equalization tank and pumps along with alkalinity and carbon adjustment equipment to the system. The changes would create a steadier flow of wastewater into the system and help in denitrification.

The problem, Lavasseur said, is that the cost for the work would be up to \$100,000, plus annual maintenance. He also said that the changes would work from September to June, but not during the summer.

"Obviously, there's no one there to flush the toilets," he said.

Last week, the school committee voted to allow Coastal Engineering, accompanied by school administrators and board members, to appeal to the DEP for a meeting to discuss alternatives. Lavasseur said three dates are available for a meeting in the department's Lakeville office.

"What we want to do is tell the DEP what goes on in the real world," he said.

Alternatives could include importing waste to keep a steady flow in the system, although Lavasseur thinks sending waste to the Tri-Town Septage Treatment Plant in Orleans should also be a possibility.

"As taxpayers, we're already paying for it anyway," he said. "For \$100,000, you can pay for a lot of septage at Tri-Town Septage for a long time."