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## HOME WASTEWATER RULES CHANGE

As of January 1, 2004, those who perform work on private on-site wastewater treatment systems (septic systems and lagoons) are required to be certified by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ). Although there has been an excellent response to date, there are still many who need to become certified before conducting work on these systems. Recently I looked at the list of certified wastewater individuals in Saline County and found only five people or businesses in Saline County listed as "certified" to do work with wastewater systems. As you go east and south of Saline County the list is even smaller.

In Saline County, certified wastewater professionals include Mitchel Martin, Aqua Plumbing and Heating; Brian Pribyl, Pribyl Plumbing and Heating; Kenny James, City of Crete; Alan Slepicka, Slepicka Brothers, Inc.; and Tim Stutzman, Stutzman Digging. There are different certification areas the license covers including Wastewater Installer, Site Evaluator, Design Layout Specialist, Inspector and Pumper.

I would not want to be the person who recently was caught dumping human waste in a dry creek bed in Nebraska that was an "uncertified" wastewater pumper. These are the kind of people that have given this type of business a bad name and why many of the wastewater operators were for the new certification rules. Often times farmers will pump septic for people but the key is the waste must be disposed of properly and now the operator needs to be certified. You can't just dump sewage any old place anymore, it has to be disposed of properly.

There is a concern in Nebraska that failing septic systems are having a negative impact on the environment and creating potentially harmful health conditions. There is a lake development subdivision near Adams in Gage County that was poorly designed and septic system drain fields were placed in backyards close to the lake. In wastewater designs like this, excess nutrients from human waste potentially can enter the lake water and cause green algae blooms in the lake. The new rules passed last year in LB94 require permits to the DEQ for small subdivisions.

In Saline County, if you build a new house or update a septic system in the rural area, you are expected to comply with Title 124. Title 124 covers the rules and regulations for wastewater systems. When you hire a contractor, the certified contractor is expected to follow Title 124 rules. Not unlike many counties our size (or smaller), no one enforces these rules unless you are "turned in" or you need to comply with mortgage or lender rules or there is a problem and the wastewater system isn't working right.

One rule I see commonly violated in Saline County (and other counties) is the lack of, or no fences around lagoons. For safety to kids and health reasons, Title 124 clearly states the lagoon shall be fenced with a four foot high woven wire, welded wire, or seven strand barbed wire. The fence shall be equipped with a standard main gate that is kept locked. If you need more specifics on the rules, let me know and I can send you a copy. Many of our failed old farm systems should be replaced by properly designed lagoons because septic system fields do not work in many of



our Saline County clay soils. That's why many of our farm homes have open discharge at the soil surface, which is illegal.

While the new certification system is being developed this year, the DEQ is grandfathering in contractors and people who pump waste but you must pay \$300.00 for the provisional certification which will be good through December 31, 2005. For more information on certification, contractors should call the DEQ Wastewater Technical Assistance Unit at 1-877-253-2603. Certification forms and information can be obtained by calling this number or by going to [www.deq.state.ne.us](http://www.deq.state.ne.us).

The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension office in Saline County has updated their NebGuides on residential wastewater treatment and I can send you information on septic systems or lagoon installation and maintenance by calling 821-2151 or e-mailing [rpryor1@unl.edu](mailto:rpryor1@unl.edu)

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