

# BE SEPTIC SAFE:

Nature Called & Clemson Extension Answered With Various Outreach Programs To Educate Citizens On Taking Care Of Business And Keeping Their Septic Systems Flowing

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## PROGRAM GOAL:

A residence is not only four walls and a roof, it also must contain a sewer or septic system. Many communities in South Carolina (SC) rely solely on septic systems regardless of socio-economic demographics and every user needs knowledge of how to protect and maintain their system to protect human and environmental health.

Be Septic Safe is a Clemson Extension (CE) program created to help provide septic system users with a variety of innovative approaches and resources that will help bridge this gap, ultimately helping protect our SC waterways.



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Bacteria is one of the top pollutants for SC waterways, with approximately 350 current impairments for surface waters throughout the state. Failing and leaking septic systems are one of the sources that can contribute to these impairments, making it an essential target for water quality education. A variety of resources were developed by CE to provide education and outreach on how septic users can "Be Septic Safe". These resources raise awareness in our communities on proper septic system maintenance and care, ultimately helping to better protect the well-being of our states' citizens and waterways against bacteria pollution.



Be Septic Safe Topics include:

- How a septic system works
- What to/not to flush down the drain
- Proper septic system maintenance and care
- How to locate your drainfield
- What to do if your system fails
- State Regulations
- How to locate licensed contractors

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Bacteria pollution often needs to be addressed through septic maintenance or whole system replacements. This can be a huge financial burden for septic users. One way communities tackle contaminants is by obtaining technical and financial assistance through SC Department of Environmental Services's (SCDES) 319 grants.

CE has been a partner for several of these grants that have taken place throughout the state. Examples include recent fix or replace program partnerships with Lake Keowee Source Water Protection Team and Edisto Island Open Land Trust.



Figure 1. Approximate locations of CE's partnerships with 319 grant projects

## EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES:

### 1. PRESENTATIONS

- Virtual webinars utilized local partnerships to provide content to participants through online presentations and Q&A sessions
- In person presentations and panel discussions were given at the SC Association of Stormwater Managers Quarterly Meeting, National Health Outreach and Engagement Conference and SC Water Resources Conference

### 2. ONLINE RESOURCES

- FAQ style website developed to act as a landing page for septic users
- Website provides users with answers questions in an easy to use drop down manner
- Website also features a Resources section and Sign Up for System Checkup reminder emails



Figure 2. Scan this QR code to visit the Be Septic Safe website!



Figure 3. Screen shot of all topic options and features that can be found at the Be Septic Safe website

Additional online resources:

- YouTube video: Q&A Interview with a Septic Contract Professional; the video helps septic users learn what to expect during the inspection process
- 9-part factsheet series housed on Clemson's Home & Garden Information Center (HGIC); the factsheets provide a more in-depth dive into the topics listed on the Be Septic Safe Website

### 3. PROMOTIONAL ITEMS

- Promotional items engage individuals and grab their attention while educating them on the topic
- Items used to spread our "Be Septic Safe" message: magnet, window cling, plunger, key chain, and door hanger
- Items were given out at community events, fairs/festivals, and education and outreach programs



Figure 4. Promotional items used to educate and promote the Be Septic Safe program



Figure 5. Promotional items are a great way to educate and grab the public's attention!

### 4. PRINTED MATERIALS

A septic guide book was developed to provide user's with a quick reference resource to be utilized to find general information and tips on how a system works and ways to care for septic systems; answer questions when issues arise; and to document location of tank, drainfield, connections, and maintenance.



## EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES:

### 5. MASS MEDIA

- 23 Billboards located throughout the state encouraging citizens to "Inspect your septic system every one to two years"
- Educational commercial aired on five stations in SC and online streaming services with the message to "Pump your septic system every three to five years"

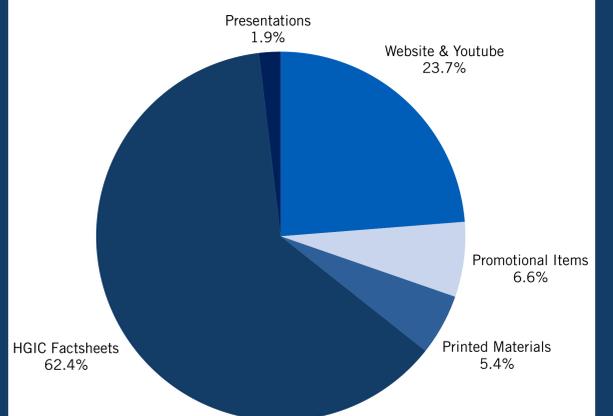


Figure 6. Billboard graphic that was on display throughout SC.



Figure 7. Scan this QR code to watch our commercial!

## SUMMARY & OUTCOMES:



This pie chart shows the different ongoing education and outreach methods that CE uses related to the "Be Septic Safe" program. Through these means CE has impacted over 56,000 individuals; and has reached many others in conjunction with other programs and publications. This does not include the one time mass media campaign, which reached approximately 13,269,871 through the billboard and the commercial had 1,968,790 views. By using a variety of strategies to disseminate education on proper septic system management, barriers often found in educational campaigns when only one method is employed are eliminated. All resources are free for use and available to all.

## FUTURE OUTLOOK:

Future plans include:

- Developing a series of online on-demand courses that will target different audiences, including realtors, vacation property owners and renters, homeowners and renters, and more
- Offering in-person workshops with septic demonstrations
- Encouraging community involvement with 319 grants and similar programs
- Partnership with SCDES to streamline septic education for the state

