



ENVIRONMENTAL ALERT

Workshop to train engineers, developers, builders in project regulation requirements

Monroe County Conservation District's technical staff is at capacity for its February NPDES Design and Build workshops.

That should be good news to critics of regulators and regulations, who often complain about the regulatory process. The conservation districts of Monroe, Pike and Northampton counties created the workshop.

The workshop will review that process, offering tips on application completeness and best project management procedures. District Manager Adam Schellhammer said the workshop aims to educate engineers and other project designers and builders about how the regulatory process works. Giving them best practices to ensure their applications are complete and meet the requirements should improve communications generally, Schellhammer said, both between district staff and applicants and between the participants themselves — in other words, between project engineers or designers and the builders.

NPDES refers to the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitting program, which regulates sites that discharge pollutants to waterways. A big part of conservation districts' mission is to prevent pollution from reaching waterways.

"We will highlight the disconnect that sometimes occurs between design engineers and the guys who are actually building" the project, Schellhammer said. That's important to those paying for the project, he added, because although good design and building practices aim to protect soil and water, when they combine with open communications they should also shorten permit approval time.

The Design and Build workshops will set out uniform practices for three counties: Monroe, Northampton and Pike. Both MCCD's engineers and one or two technicians will lead the workshops, which run from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Feb. 12-13. Topics will stress the best ways to protect soil and water through both project design and proper construction sequence. Tailoring design to a site helps protect water resources, and making sure each stage of construction happens in the proper order does also, Schellhammer said.

Already 160 engineers, developers and builders from across the three counties have signed up; capacity is 190.

"You need to include the design team on both sides," Schellhammer said, "and tie (design) back to the resource rather than the regulations."

Making sure builders, designers and regulators keep talking to each other as projects move forward is key to resource protection and timely, affordable projects.

— Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association