

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

An Act to amend and reenact § 32.1-164 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 10 of Chapter 6 of Title 32.1 a section numbered 32.1-248.3, relating to the Environmental Health Education and Training Fund; civil penalty.

[H 2691]

Approved

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 32.1-164 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Article 10 of Chapter 6 of Title 32.1 a section numbered 32.1-248.3 as follows:

§ 32.1-164. Powers and duties of Board; regulations; fees; authorized onsite soil evaluators; letters in lieu of permits; inspections; civil penalties.

A. The Board shall have supervision and control over the safe and sanitary collection, conveyance, transportation, treatment, and disposal of sewage by onsite sewage systems and alternative discharging sewage systems, and treatment works as they affect the public health and welfare. In discharging the responsibility to supervise and control the safe and sanitary treatment and disposal of sewage as they affect the public health and welfare, the Board shall exercise due diligence to protect the quality of both surface water and ground water. Upon the final adoption of a general Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination permit by the State Water Control Board, the Board of Health shall assume the responsibility for permitting alternative discharging sewage systems as defined in § 32.1-163. All such permits shall comply with the applicable regulations of the State Water Control Board and be registered with the State Water Control Board.

In the exercise of its duty to supervise and control the treatment and disposal of sewage, the Board shall require and the Department shall conduct regular inspections of alternative discharging sewage systems. The Board shall also establish requirements for maintenance contracts for alternative discharging sewage systems. The Board may require, as a condition for issuing a permit to operate an alternative discharging sewage system, that the applicant present an executed maintenance contract. Such contract shall be maintained for the life of any general Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit issued by the State Water Control Board.

B. The regulations of the Board shall govern the collection, conveyance, transportation, treatment and disposal of sewage by onsite sewage systems and alternative discharging sewage systems. Such regulations shall be designed to protect the public health and promote the public welfare and may include, without limitation:

1. A requirement that the owner obtain a permit from the Commissioner prior to the construction, installation, modification or operation of a sewerage system or treatment works except in those instances where a permit is required pursuant to Chapter 3.1 (§ 62.1-44.2 et seq.) of Title 62.1.

2. Criteria for the granting or denial of such permits.

3. Standards for the design, construction, installation, modification and operation of sewerage systems and treatment works for permits issued by the Commissioner.

4. Standards governing disposal of sewage on or in soils.

5. Standards specifying the minimum distance between sewerage systems or treatment works and:

(a) Public and private wells supplying water for human consumption,

(b) Lakes and other impounded waters,

(c) Streams and rivers,

(d) Shellfish waters,

(e) Ground waters,

(f) Areas and places of human habitation,

(g) Property lines.

6. Standards as to the adequacy of an approved water supply.

7. Standards governing the transportation of sewage.

8. A prohibition against the discharge of untreated sewage onto land or into waters of the Commonwealth.

9. A requirement that such residences, buildings, structures and other places designed for human occupancy as the Board may prescribe be provided with a sewerage system or treatment works.

10. Criteria for determining the demonstrated ability of alternative onsite systems, which are not permitted through the then current sewage handling and disposal regulations, to treat and dispose of

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sewage as effectively as approved methods.

11. Standards for inspections of and requirements for maintenance contracts for alternative discharging sewage systems.

12. Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision 1 above and Chapter 3.1 of Title 62.1, a requirement that the owner obtain a permit from the Commissioner prior to the construction, installation, modification, or operation of an alternative discharging sewage system as defined in § 32.1-163.

13. Criteria for granting, denying, and revoking of permits for alternative discharging sewage systems.

14. Procedures for issuing letters recognizing onsite sewage sites in lieu of issuing onsite sewage system permits.

15. Criteria for approved training courses, testing requirements, and application fees for persons wishing to be authorized onsite soil evaluators.

16. Procedures for listing, removing from the list, and reinstating on the list those persons who have successfully qualified to be authorized onsite soil evaluators.

C. A fee of \$75 shall be charged for filing an application for an onsite sewage disposal system or an alternative discharging sewage system permit with the Department. Funds received in payment of such charges shall be transmitted to the Comptroller for deposit. The funds from the fees shall be credited to a special fund to be appropriated by the General Assembly, as it deems necessary, to the Department for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this title. However, \$10 of each fee shall be credited to the Onsite Sewage Indemnification Fund established pursuant to § 32.1-164.1:01.

The Board, in its regulations, shall establish a procedure for the waiver of fees for persons whose incomes are below the federal poverty guidelines established by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or when the application is for a pit privy or the repair of a failing onsite sewage disposal system. If the Department denies the permit for land on which the applicant seeks to construct his principal place of residence, then such fee shall be refunded to the applicant.

From such funds as are appropriated to the Department from the special fund, the Board shall apportion a share to local or district health departments to be allocated in the same ratios as provided for the operation of such health departments pursuant to § 32.1-31. Such funds shall be transmitted to the local or district health departments on a quarterly basis.

D. In addition to factors related to the Board's responsibilities for the safe and sanitary treatment and disposal of sewage as they affect the public health and welfare, the Board shall, in establishing standards, give due consideration to economic costs of such standards in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Administrative Process Act (§ 2.2-4000 et seq.).

E. Further a fee of \$75 shall be charged for such installation and monitoring inspections of alternative discharging sewage systems as may be required by the Board. The funds received in payment of such fees shall be credited to a special fund to be appropriated by the General Assembly, as it deems necessary, to the Department for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this section. However, \$10 of each fee shall be credited to the Onsite Sewage Indemnification Fund established pursuant to § 32.1-164.1:01.

The Board, in its regulations, shall establish a procedure for the waiver of fees for persons whose incomes are below the federal poverty guidelines established by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

F. Any owner who violates any provision of this section or any regulation of the Board of Health or the State Water Control Board relating to alternative discharging sewage systems or who fails to comply with any order of the Board of Health or any special final order of the State Water Control Board shall be subject to the penalties provided in §§ 32.1-27 and 62.1-44.32.

In the event that a county, city, or town, or its agent, is the owner, the county, city, or town, or its agent may initiate a civil action against any user or users of an alternative discharging sewage system to recover that portion of any civil penalty imposed against the owner which directly resulted from violations by the user or users of any applicable federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or ordinances.

G. The Board shall establish a program for qualifying individuals as authorized onsite soil evaluators. The Board's program shall include, but not be limited to, approved training courses, written and field tests, application fees to cover the costs of the program, renewal fees and schedules, and procedures for listing, removing from the list, and reinstating individuals as authorized onsite soil evaluators. To contain costs, the Board shall use or enhance the written and field tests given to Department of Health sanitarians as the testing vehicle for authorized onsite soil evaluators. Until July 1, 2001, a person holding a certificate as a Virginia certified professional soil scientist from the Board of Professional Soil Scientists shall be deemed to be qualified, upon application and demonstration of the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to conduct onsite soil evaluations, as an authorized onsite soil evaluator without completing the Board's training courses and taking the written and field tests. The Board shall furnish the list of authorized onsite soil evaluators to all local and district health departments.

H. The Board shall establish and implement procedures for issuance of letters recognizing the appropriateness of onsite sewage site conditions in lieu of issuing onsite sewage system permits. Such letters shall state, in language determined by the Office of the Attorney General and approved by the Board, the appropriateness of the soil for a traditional septic or other onsite sewage system; no system design shall be required for issuance of such letter. The letter may be recorded in the land records of the clerk of the circuit court in the jurisdiction where all or part of the site or proposed site of the septic or other onsite sewage system is to be located so as to be a binding notice to the public, including subsequent purchases of the land in question. Upon the sale or transfer of the land which is the subject of any letter, the letter shall be transferred with the title to the property. A permit shall be issued on the basis of such letter unless, from the date of the letter's issuance, there has been a substantial, intervening change in the soil or site conditions where the septic system or other onsite sewage system is to be located. The Board, Commissioner, and the Department shall accept evaluations from authorized onsite soil evaluators for the issuance of such letters, if they are produced in accordance with the Board's established procedures for issuance of letters. The Department shall issue such letters within 20 working days of the application filing date when evaluations produced by authorized onsite soil evaluators are submitted as supporting documentation. The Department shall not be required to do a field check of the evaluation prior to issuing such a letter or a permit based on such letter; however, the Department may conduct such field analyses as deemed necessary to protect the integrity of the Commonwealth's environment. Applicants for such letters in lieu of onsite sewage system permits shall pay the fee established by the Board for the letters' issuance and, upon application for a septic system permit or other onsite sewage system permit, shall pay the permit application fee.

I. *The Board shall establish a uniform schedule of civil penalties for violations of regulations promulgated pursuant to subsection B that are not remedied within 30 days after service of notice from the Department. Civil penalties collected pursuant to this chapter shall be credited to the Environmental Health Education and Training Fund established pursuant to § 32.1-248.3.*

This schedule of civil penalties shall be uniform for each type of specified violation, and the penalty for any one violation shall be not more than \$100 for the initial violation and not more than \$150 for each additional violation. Each day during which the violation is found to have existed shall constitute a separate offense. However, specified violations arising from the same operative set of facts shall not be charged more than once in any 10-day period, and a series of specified violations arising from the same operative set of facts shall not result in civil penalties exceeding a total of \$3,000. Penalties shall not apply to unoccupied structures which do not contribute to the pollution of public or private water supplies or the contraction or spread of infectious, contagious, or dangerous diseases. The Department may pursue other remedies as provided by law; however, designation of a particular violation for a civil penalty pursuant to this section shall be in lieu of criminal penalties, except for any violation that contributes to or is likely to contribute to the pollution of public or private water supplies or the contraction or spread of infectious, contagious, or dangerous diseases.

The Department may issue a civil summons ticket as provided by law for a scheduled violation. Any person summoned or issued a ticket for a scheduled violation may make an appearance in person or in writing by mail to the Department prior to the date fixed for trial in court. Any person so appearing may enter a waiver of trial, admit liability, and pay the civil penalty established for the offense charged.

If a person charged with a scheduled violation does not elect to enter a waiver of trial and admit liability, the violation shall be tried in the general district court with jurisdiction in the same manner and with the same right of appeal as provided for by law. In any trial for a scheduled violation, the Department shall have the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence the liability of the alleged violator. An admission of liability or finding of liability under this section shall not be deemed an admission at a criminal proceeding.

This section shall not be interpreted to allow the imposition of civil penalties for activities related to land development.

§ 32.1-248.3. Environmental Health Education and Training Fund.

There is hereby created the Environmental Health Education and Training Fund whose purpose is to receive moneys generated by the civil penalties collected by the Department pursuant to § 32.1-164 and appropriated by the Commonwealth for the purpose of supporting, training, educating, and recognizing public- and private-sector individuals in all areas of Environmental Health, including Authorized Onsite Soil Evaluators and Department employees. Civil penalties collected by the Department shall be deposited by the Comptroller to this fund to be appropriated for the purposes of this section to the Department by the General Assembly as it deems necessary. The fund may also be used, in the discretion of the Board, for research to improve public health and for protection of the environment.