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HOUSE BILL NO. 2188

Offered January 14, 2009

Prefiled January 14, 2009

A BILL to amend and reenact § 32.1-164 of the Code of Virginia, as it shall become effective, relating to onsite treatment works.

Patrons—Phillips and Kilgore

Referred to Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 32.1-164 of the Code of Virginia, as it shall become effective, is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 32.1-164. (Effective July 1, 2009) Powers and duties of Board; regulations; fees; 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. The Board shall also have supervision and control over the maintenance, inspection, and reuse of alternative onsite sewage systems 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 and the maintenance, inspection, and reuse of alternative onsite 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.

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

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

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

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

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

71 15. *A provision that a surveyed plat shall not be required as part of an application for a permit for*
72 *an onsite sewage system where the system for which the permit is sought is not located within 200 feet*
73 *of the property boundary.*

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

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

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

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

93 E. Further a fee of \$75 shall be charged for such installation and monitoring inspections of
94 alternative discharging sewage systems as may be required by the Board. The funds received in payment
95 of such fees shall be credited to a special fund to be appropriated by the General Assembly, as it deems
96 necessary, to the Department for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this section. However,
97 \$10 of each fee shall be credited to the Onsite Sewage Indemnification Fund established pursuant to
98 § 32.1-164.1:01.

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

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

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

110 G. The Board shall establish and implement procedures for issuance of letters recognizing the
111 appropriateness of onsite sewage site conditions in lieu of issuing onsite sewage system permits. Such
112 letters shall state, in language determined by the Office of the Attorney General and approved by the
113 Board, the appropriateness of the soil for an onsite sewage system; no system design shall be required
114 for issuance of such letter. The letter may be recorded in the land records of the clerk of the circuit
115 court in the jurisdiction where all or part of the site or proposed site of the onsite sewage system is to
116 be located so as to be a binding notice to the public, including subsequent purchases of the land in
117 question. Upon the sale or transfer of the land which is the subject of any letter, the letter shall be
118 transferred with the title to the property. A permit shall be issued on the basis of such letter unless, from
119 the date of the letter's issuance, there has been a substantial, intervening change in the soil or site
120 conditions where the onsite sewage system is to be located. The Board, Commissioner, and the

Department shall accept evaluations from licensed 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 licensed 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 an onsite sewage system permit, shall pay the permit application fee.

H. The Board shall establish a program for the operation and maintenance of alternative onsite systems. The program shall require:

1. The owner of an alternative onsite sewage system, as defined in § 32.1-163, to have that system operated by a licensed operator, as defined in § 32.1-163, and visited by the operator as specified in the operation permit;

2. The licensed operator to provide a report on the results of the site visit utilizing the web-based system required by this subsection. A fee of \$1 shall be paid by the licensed operator at the time the report is filed. Such fees shall be credited to the Onsite Operation and Maintenance Fund established pursuant to § 32.1-164.8;

3. A statewide web-based reporting system to track the operation, monitoring, and maintenance requirements of each system, including its components. The system shall have the capability for pre-notification of operation, maintenance, or monitoring to the operator or owner. Licensed operators shall be required to enter their reports onto the system. The Department of Health shall utilize the system to provide for compliance monitoring of operation and maintenance requirements throughout the state. The Commissioner shall consider readily available commercial systems currently utilized within the Commonwealth; and

4. Any additional requirements deemed necessary by the Board.

I. The Board shall promulgate regulations governing the requirements for maintaining alternative onsite sewage systems.

J. 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.