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# Wastewater Task Group

By Dan Fein

I don't like acronyms that I can't pronounce. Trying to pronounce **MRWTG (Monte Rio Wastewater Task Group)** makes me feel like I have peanut butter stuck to the roof of my mouth. Despite its homely acronym, the task group is working to gather and disseminate information about how Monte Rio homes and businesses deal with wastewater and what changes might be required. MRWTG is a special task group that was appointed by the Director of the Community Development Commission (CDC), which also manages the Russian River Redevelopment project.

The task group has embarked on a process to educate its members and educate the community about the issues. With a clear and common understanding of what the problems are, the Monte Rio community can think about which of those problems we would actually be able to solve.

The problem discovery phase consists of a series of 90-minute presentations/panel discussions on different topics that are intended to provide a broad overview. Each of the presentations will be done twice, once during the regular monthly meetings of the Task Group and again as an all-day symposium later this year. Community members will have more than one chance to participate, and the task group will be able to improve and possibly expand the symposium presentations based on feedback from the first go-around.

### The topics include

- How Septic Systems Work
- The Regulatory Environment
- Historical Perspectives
- What Other Communities Are Doing
- Technical Possibilities

At the Task Group's December meeting, Rich Holmer, who is retired from the Well and Septic division of PRMD gave an excellent presentation on How Septic Systems work. At the January meeting Rene DeMonchy moderated a panel of representatives from the County PRMD and Environmental Health, the County Water Agency and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. The group discussed current septic regulations and how they are applied to Monte Rio. The February meeting will be a discussion of what was learned from the last attempt to implement a centralized sewage treatment system.

Here are some of the things I've learned from what has been presented so far:

- Conventional and non-conventional systems are referred to as Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems or OWTS. A conventional septic system consists of a treatment device (tank) and a disposal system (leach field).
- Septic tanks settle out solids from the water. Leach fields disperse the water into soil where bacteria consume most pollutants.
- The size of a leach field depends on the ability of the soil to absorb and remove pollutants and the amount of water expected to be treated.
- A leach field has an expected useful life of about 30 years. In new construction there has to be enough land for a second leach field to replace the first one.
- The Basin Plan for the North Coast Region lays out the State's requirements for site conditions for locating OWTS and particularly leach fields that disperse their effluent. The

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