



Barry-Eaton District Health Department

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Barry-Eaton Board of Health Discusses TOST, Communicable Disease

The Barry-Eaton Board of Health met for their monthly meeting on Thursday, December 21, at BEDHD's Charlotte office. Barry County board members Commissioners Ben Geiger (chair), David Jackson, and Dan Parker and Eaton County board members Commissioners Joe Brehler, Blake Mulder, and Jane Whitacre were present; no board members were absent.

The Board of Health continued its discussions on revising the Time of Sale or Transfer (TOST) program in response to constituent feedback. Since November, the board has been working with health department staff to make changes to the regulation. While progress is being made to address many of the key concerns about the program, Colette Scrimger, Health Officer, reviewed the existing state laws applicable to onsite septic and water systems that require local health department action. While everyone has to have an approved system, and state and local laws are set up that way, there are no state laws that provide a method to find critical problems. For example, if the health department discovers that a sewage system doesn't exist, and a residence is discharging sewage illegally, the health department takes action to assure the sewage system is installed. However, many counties who do not have a TOST program do not have a process to find out whether the system that was originally installed is still functional, or even if there is one there at all. According to the TOST 10-year Report, the percentage of wells that had problems requiring correction was about 2 in 10 sites, and about 2.5 sites out of 10 sites had problems requiring correction in their sewage system.

Scrimger reviewed the key objectives that a public health-based sewage and water program is addressing: 1) Assure the laws of the land, meaning state and local laws relating to sewage and water systems, are being followed; 2) Have a process in place to evaluate aging infrastructure, 3) Assure that systems continue to function as intended, 4) Standardize evaluations, so that buyers and sellers can be assured that they are getting accurate information about their systems, and 5) Educate on the importance of maintaining on-site sewage and water systems. The TOST program's overall purpose is to protect public health and to protect the environment. There was general consensus from the board members that these were important goals that should be retained. Scrimger recommended that changes to the regulation should be evaluated to see if they would be supportive of these goals.

Board members reviewed and discussed potential changes to the regulation. The board will continue their discussions about a revised regulation at the next meeting in January. Concerning the discussion at the meeting, Commissioner Ben Geiger (Barry County), Board of Health Chair, noted, "As we continue to evaluate changes to the TOST program, it's important that we assure that we are still protecting the public health and the environment of our counties." Commissioner Blake Mulder (Eaton County), stated, "I think it's critical to know that Eaton County is willing to work on this, and it's important. It should not detract from the relationship between our two counties, and the rest of the important work that the Health Department is doing."

This recent work on TOST is in addition to the continual response of the health department to public concerns. In September 2015, TOST improvements were made in several program areas, including communications, the decision appeal process, correction options, evaluation criteria, and evaluation

categories. Further, in September 2017, the health department released the TOST 10-Year Report, which outlines the purpose of the program, its successes (including data analyses), and changes made to it since its inception. TOST reports are available at <https://goo.gl/SZCVMw>.

Other topics of discussion at the meeting included a summary of current communicable disease activity. Influenza cases are increasing across the state; there have been 2 cases in Barry County and 2 cases in Eaton County already this season. BEDHD is reporting 10 cases of whooping cough since the end of November, primarily in middle/high school students in Eaton County. BEDHD staff have worked closely with the schools affected to encourage vaccination to persons who were exposed. BEDHD has also confirmed a Hepatitis A case in Eaton County this week, but will not know about possible connection to the SE Michigan outbreak for up to two weeks while the sample is being tested.

Scrimger discussed potential new funding for services provided by Eaton Behavioral Health for Medication Assisted Treatment for Opioid Dependence at the Eaton County Jail. Scrimger discussed the plans to hire additional staff to replace vacancies in the program, as well as ongoing conversations with the program's funder, the Mid-State Health Network, regarding the program's performance, service volume, and cost.

The Barry-Eaton Board of Health comprises six county commissioners (three from each county). Current Board of Health members are Commissioners Ben Geiger (chair), David Jackson, and Dan Parker from Barry County and Commissioners Joe Brehler, Blake Mulder, and Jane Whitacre from Eaton County. The Board of Health meets the fourth Thursday of each month at 9:30 am. The meetings are held at the Barry County BEDHD office during odd months (January, March, etc.) and at the Eaton County BEDHD office during even months (February, April, etc.). Board of Health meeting minutes and agendas are available at <https://www.barryeatonhealth.org/about-us/board-health>.