

# Child Care and Septic Systems....Be in the Know When Kids Have to Go

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## Introduction

Septic systems serving home child cares are at a high risk of failing, thereby creating an imminent public health hazard. In Snohomish County, Washington, the Snohomish Health District's Partners in Child Care (PiCC) Program sought to develop a process of effectively managing septic systems serving home child cares. Snohomish County contains approximately 1,000 licensed child cares caring for about 17,000 children. Of these licensed child cares, roughly 220 are home child cares served by septic systems.

PiCC staff identified that many child care septic systems were either failing, near failing, or positioned to fail within the next several years due to improper system maintenance, use beyond the system design capacity, or insufficient education of the child care provider. PiCC staff project the number of system failures would be reduced with provider education and a method to track these systems. An additional problem is that the state's child care regulations and local wastewater regulations are not compatible. Finding a balance between the agencies' regulations would be necessary for the project to be successful statewide.



*Actual situation: An older 2 bedroom home in the center of a mid-size town is served by the original septic system. The home was recently licensed as a child care center serving 44 children. How long would you expect the septic system to function?*

## Project Goals and Objectives

**Project Goal:** to minimize child care septic system failure by increasing the number of Snohomish County child cares operating with an adequate septic system review.

**Health Problem:** septic systems serving home child cares have an increased risk of failure which can result in significant health concerns if children are exposed to untreated sewage.

**Outcome Objective:** by December 31, 2006, the number of home child cares served by septic systems that have been identified and reviewed by SHD will approach 90%.

## Contributing Factors / Challenges

- Home child care providers did not understand the negative public health outcomes associated with a failing septic system or ways in which they should maintain their systems.
- State licensing personnel lacked septic system knowledge.
- Septic systems were designed for single family residences not child care businesses.
- PiCC needed a database to record, store, and track data.
- State and local health agencies lacked a consistent and appropriate method of managing child care septic systems.

## Project Methods

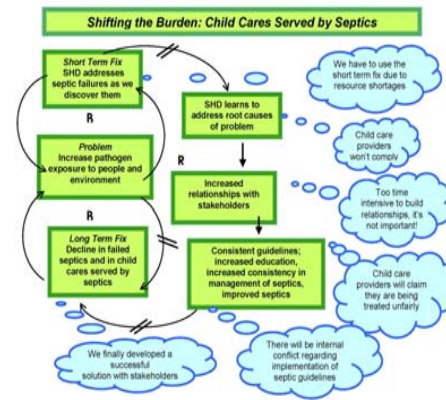
- Create a database for Snohomish County home child cares served by septic systems.
- Achieve internal consistency between SHD divisions.
- Develop and strengthen partnerships with state licensing staff and local health.
- Develop and share a draft of *Snohomish Health District Guidelines to Managing Child Care Septic Systems*. Attend meetings to reinforce communications and collaborations.
- Update and create child care septic educational materials, and offer septic consultations to child care providers.
- Present project at statewide conferences and trainings.



## Project Logic Model

Responsible Party	Activities	Outputs	Process Outcomes	Population Impacts
<b>Agency: Snohomish Health District</b> <b>Program: Partners in Child Care</b> <b>Goal: To increase septic system awareness of child care providers and to reduce the number of child cares in Snohomish County on properties with inadequate septic systems.</b>	<b>Staff:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop project timeline</li> <li>Identify and gain stakeholder support</li> <li>Develop guidelines</li> <li>Conduct site visits</li> <li>Develop MSU</li> <li>Transfer information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project timeline established</li> <li>Septic guidelines established, implemented, and revised</li> <li>Database developed, updated, and maintained (SHD, and state listing)</li> <li>MSU established</li> <li>Conference Presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child care providers and other stakeholders receive consistent information and action from SHD</li> <li>SHD's database is informed of the newly established SHD guidelines and can use those guidelines if needed</li> <li>PiCC electronic technology and security of database is increased</li> <li>Owner/tenants/contractors to have septic systems are managed by LJA's and SHD, they improve</li> <li>Stakeholder understanding of septic systems, proper maintenance, and public health is increased</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and staff attending licensed child care served by septic lines likely to be exposed to pathogens</li> <li>The facilities of the state-licensed child care and staff are less likely to be exposed to pathogens</li> <li>Child care providers better protect the health of children in their care</li> <li>Child care providers better protect their property and the environment</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholders:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WSPW</li> <li>ECCLC</li> <li>COH</li> <li>Providers</li> <li>CCCBH</li> <li>LJA's</li> <li>Child Care Action Council</li> </ul>	<b>Collaborative Projects:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Runny LJA's</li> <li>Communicate with stakeholders</li> <li>Consult with child care providers before training outreach</li> <li>Answer ongoing questions from child care providers and other project stakeholders</li> <li>Develop written materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LJA's surveyed</li> <li>Communications with stakeholders</li> <li>Septic consults with providers</li> <li>Materials developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child care providers are educated in the importance of maintaining septic systems and how that is related to the health of the children in their care</li> <li>Child care providers are informed of the risks associated with operating a septic system served by a septic system</li> <li>Written educational materials are developed</li> </ul>	

## Project Systems Thinking



## Outcomes

Project outcomes and activities have been plentiful and successful and the project largely progressed as originally planned. Some of the project's results are:

- PiCC created and uses a comprehensive septic database to manage child care septic information in Snohomish County.
- A survey of local health jurisdictions in Washington indicates that only ~50% of counties have had interaction with child care providers on septic systems, and that their management varies widely.
- The *SHD Guidelines to Managing Child Care Septic Systems* continue to be developed as written in the project plan.
- Child care providers have a better understanding of how septic systems work and how to minimize failure risks through education by PiCC staff.
- The licensing agency has generally followed PiCC's recommendation on license capacity based on septic system design. PiCC continues to further establish relationships with the Washington State child care licensing agency.

## Conclusion

The project activities have resulted in marked progress in the overall management of local child cares served by septic systems. A significant percentage of licensed home child cares in Snohomish County on septic systems have been identified through the licensing process, allowing the PiCC staff to educate those child care providers. Additionally, dialogue between the Snohomish Health District and the Washington State child care licensing agency is open and progressive.

The PiCC Program fully intends to continue managing child care septic systems. Although the methods and objectives may vary over time, the overall focus of effective and educational management of septic systems will remain unchanged. The future objective is to work with other local health jurisdictions in implementing a consistent septic review process for all child care providers in Washington state.

*"If you always do what you always did, then you will always get what you always got!"*



Source unknown

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