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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2015

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A N A C T

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- THE RHODE ISLAND CESSPOOL ACT OF  
2007

Introduced By: Senators Sosnowski, Conley, and Goldin

Date Introduced: February 25, 2015

Referred To: Senate Environment & Agriculture

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 23-19.15-2, 23-19.15-3, 23-19.15-4, 23-19.15-5, 23-19.15-6, 23-  
2 19.15-7, 23-19.15-8 and 23-19.15-9 of the General Laws in Chapter 23-19.15 entitled "The  
3 Rhode Island Cesspool Act of 2007" are hereby amended to read as follows:

4 **23-19.15-2. Legislative findings.** -- The general assembly hereby recognizes and  
5 declares that:

6 (1) There exists ~~within certain portions of the state the a~~ need to abate pollution and  
7 threats to public health caused by cesspools, ~~particularly high risk cesspools that pose direct~~  
8 ~~threats to public health and the environment.~~

9 (2) It is estimated that there are more than ~~fifty thousand (50,000)~~ twenty-five thousand  
10 (25,000) cesspools within the state as of ~~2006~~ 2013.

11 (3) Cesspools are a substandard and ~~often~~ inadequate means of sewage ~~treatment and~~  
12 disposal.

13 (4) ~~Many cesspools~~ Cesspools contribute directly to groundwater and surface water  
14 contamination and environmental impacts will be exacerbated by increased precipitation, storm  
15 frequency and sea level rise.

16 (5) Wastewater disposed from cesspools contains bacteria, viruses, ammonium and other  
17 pollutants ~~with high biochemical oxygen demand~~, and may also include phosphates, chlorides,  
18 grease, and chemicals used to clean cesspools.

1 (6) Wastewater disposed from cesspools ~~frequently exceeds~~ violates drinking water  
2 health standards for certain contaminants.

3 (7) Wastewater disposed from cesspools can pose significant health threats to people  
4 who come into contact with, or consume, contaminated surface waters or groundwaters.

5 (8) Appropriate treatment of sewage disposed into the ground is essential to the  
6 protection of public health and the environment, particularly in relation to Narragansett Bay and  
7 the rest of the state's coastal region, and public drinking water resources.

8 (9) Replacement of cesspools with ~~modern ISDS~~ onsite wastewater treatment systems  
9 (OWTS) technology reduces risks to public health and the environment.

10 (10) In sewered areas, sewer tie-ins offer a readily available, ~~low-cost~~ environmentally  
11 preferable means of mitigating problems and threats caused by cesspools.

12 (11) A fund exists to assist homeowners with the costs of removing cesspools and  
13 inadequate septic systems and replacing them with an approved ~~ISDS~~ OWTS if the community in  
14 which the homeowner resides has created a wastewater management district in accordance with  
15 chapter 24.5 of title 45.

16 **23-19.15-3. Declaration of purpose.** -- The purpose of this chapter is to phase-out use of  
17 cesspools ~~that present the highest risk to public health and/or the environment—namely,~~  
18 ~~cesspools~~ beginning with those located in close proximity to tidal water areas and public drinking  
19 ~~waters~~ water supplies. Additionally, this chapter ~~is intended to allow for the identification and~~  
20 ~~assessment of cesspools on all properties throughout the state that are subject to sale, and to~~  
21 ~~phase out any such cesspools that are found to be failed~~ provides for the connection of properties  
22 served by cesspools to available sewer lines and requires the identification and replacement of  
23 cesspools on all properties throughout the state that are subject to sale or transfer.

24 **23-19.15-4. Definitions.** -- For the purposes of this chapter the following terms shall  
25 mean:

26 (1) "Cesspool" means any buried chamber other than an ~~individual sewage disposal~~  
27 ~~system~~ onsite wastewater treatment system (OWTS), including, but not limited to, any metal  
28 tank, perforated concrete vault or covered hollow or excavation, which receives discharges of  
29 sanitary sewage from a building for the purpose of collecting solids and discharging liquids to the  
30 surrounding soil.

31 (2) "Department" means the department of environmental management as established in  
32 chapter 17.1 of title 42.

33 (3) "Director" means the director of the department of environmental management or his  
34 or her designee.

1 (4) "Failed cesspool" means a cesspool where one or more of the following conditions  
2 exist: (i) the cesspool fails to accept or dispose of sewage, as evidenced by sewage at the ground  
3 surface above or adjacent to the cesspool, or in the building served; (ii) the liquid depth in a  
4 cesspool is less than six (6) inches from the inlet pipe invert; (iii) pumping is required more than  
5 two (2) times a year; (iv) the cesspool is shown to have contaminated a drinking water well or  
6 watercourse; or (v) there is shown to be direct contact between the bottom of the cesspool and the  
7 groundwater table.

8 (5) ~~"Individual sewage disposal system" or "ISDS"~~ "Onsite wastewater treatment  
9 system" or "OWTS" means any system of piping, tanks, disposal areas, alternative toilets or other  
10 facilities designed to function as a unit to convey, store, treat and/or dispose of sanitary sewage,  
11 by means other than discharge into a public sewer system. A cesspool is not an OWTS.

12 (6) "System inspector" means a person ~~approved by the department as~~ who is registered  
13 as an inspector and capable of properly assessing the condition of an ~~ISDS~~ OWTS.

14 (7) "Transfer" means a transfer of real property except between the following  
15 relationships:

16 (i) Between current spouses;

17 (ii) Between parents and their children;

18 (iii) Between full siblings; or

19 (iv) Where the grantor transfers the real property to be held in a revocable or irrevocable  
20 trust, where at least one of the designated beneficiaries is of the first degree of relationship to the  
21 grantor.

22 (8) "Wastewater" means human or animal excremental liquid or substance, putrescible  
23 animal or vegetable garbage or filth, including, but not limited to, waste discharged from toilets,  
24 bath tubs, showers, laundry tubs, washing machines, sinks and dishwashers.

25 **23-19.15-5. ~~Inspection~~ Inspection requirements for cesspools located in close**  
26 **proximity to tidal waters and public drinking supplies.** -- (a) Unless exempted under  
27 subsection 23-19.15-8(a), the owner of property served by a cesspool in the following areas shall  
28 cause an inspection to be performed on said cesspool by a system inspector in accordance with a  
29 schedule established by the department, but no later than January 1, 2012:

30 (1) Which cesspool is within two hundred feet (200') of the inland edge of a shoreline  
31 feature bordering a tidal water area [corresponding to the jurisdiction of the RI Coastal Resources  
32 Management Council];

33 (2) Which cesspool is within two hundred feet (200') of a public drinking water well; and

34 (3) Which cesspool is within two hundred feet (200') of a surface drinking water supply,

1 specifically the impoundment from which water is drawn via the intake.

2 The inspection shall be conducted [by a system inspector as defined herein](#) and reported  
3 in accordance with procedures required by the department, and the results shall be recorded on  
4 forms prescribed by the department.

5 (b) Pursuant to § 5-20.8-13, every contract for the purchase and sale of real estate which  
6 is or may be served by a private cesspool, shall provide that potential purchasers be permitted a  
7 ten (10) day period, unless the parties mutually agree upon a different period of time, to conduct  
8 an inspection of the property's on-site sewage system in accordance with procedures required by  
9 the department in subsection 23-19.15-5(a), before becoming obligated under the contract to  
10 purchase.

11 **23-19.15-6. Cesspool removal and replacement.** -- (a) Any cesspool [located in close](#)  
12 [proximity to tidal water areas and public drinking water supplies and](#) required to be abandoned  
13 pursuant to this chapter shall be replaced with an approved ~~ISDS~~ [OWTS](#), or the building served  
14 by the cesspool shall be connected to a public sewer, prior to the applicable deadlines contained  
15 in subsection 23-19.15-6(b).

16 (b) Cesspools found to be located within the areas identified in subsection 23-19.15-5(a)  
17 above shall cease to be used for sewage disposal and shall be properly abandoned in accordance  
18 with the following schedule:

19 (1) Tier 1. - Any cesspool deemed by the department or a system inspector to be failed in  
20 accordance with this chapter shall be properly abandoned within one year of discovery unless an  
21 immediate public health hazard is identified, in which case the director may require a shorter  
22 period of time.

23 (2) Tier 2. - Any cesspool located on a property which has a sewer stub enabling  
24 connection to a public sewer shall be properly abandoned, and the building served by the cesspool  
25 shall be connected into the sewer system of such premises with such sewer and fill up and destroy  
26 any cesspool, privy vault, drain or other arrangement on such land for the reception of sewage,  
27 excluding any Rhode Island department of environmental management ~~ISDS~~ [OWTS](#) approved  
28 system, prior to January 1, 2014.

29 (3) Tier 3. - Any cesspool within two hundred feet (200') of a public drinking water well,  
30 or within two hundred feet (200') of the inland edge of a shoreline feature bordering a tidal water  
31 area [corresponding to the jurisdiction of the RI Coastal Resources Management Council] or  
32 within two hundred feet (200) of a surface drinking water supply [specifically, the impoundment  
33 from which water is drawn via the intake] shall be properly abandoned by January 1, 2014.

34 **23-19.15-7. Waiver.** -- The director may grant a waiver, to the extent necessary, from

1 applicable provisions listed in subsection 23-19.15-6(b) provided the homeowner demonstrates  
2 undue hardship defined as having an annual income of less than or equal to eighty percent (80%)  
3 of the appropriate household size area median income determined by the federal Housing and  
4 Urban Development standards for the community within which the cesspool is located, and the  
5 cesspool is not a failed system as defined herein. No waiver shall exceed five (5) years from the  
6 dates specified in subsection 23-19.15-6(b). Any waiver granted shall expire upon transfer or sale  
7 of the land or easement upon which the cesspool is located.

8 **23-19.15-8. Exemption.** -- (a) The provisions of ~~§§ 23-19.15-5, and subsection~~ 23-19.15-  
9 6(a) and 23-19.15-12(a) shall not apply to any cesspool located in an area of a community  
10 covered by municipal on-site wastewater management ordinance that requires the risk-based  
11 phase-out of cesspools on an alternative schedule that meets the purposes of this act.

12 (b) The provisions of ~~subdivision §§ 23-19.15-6(b)(2) and 23-19.15-12~~ shall not apply to  
13 any cesspool located on a property that is properly designated to be sewered no later than six (6)  
14 years after the applicable deadlines provided in ~~subdivision 23-19.15-6(b)(2) § 23-19.15-6(b)(3)~~  
15 provided: (1) The sewerage project is identified in the city, town or sewer district's wastewater  
16 facilities plan as approved by DEM prior to January 1, 2013; (2) The municipality, acting through  
17 its city or town council, states in writing to the director of the department of environmental  
18 management by January 1, 2013 that the municipality will complete construction of the sewerage  
19 project on or before January 1, 2020; and (3) The property owner certifies, in writing, that the  
20 dwelling/building will be connected to the sewer system within six (6) months of receipt of the  
21 notification to connect to the sewer system and that no increase in the design sewage flow or  
22 number of bedrooms in the building will occur until the connection is made.

23 (c) In addition to subdivision 23-19.15-8(b)(2), above, the municipality must  
24 demonstrate by December 31, 2014 that it has bond authorization or some other dedicated  
25 financial surety for expansion of sewers to the area of the building served by the cesspool. If the  
26 municipality fails to demonstrate such surety, this exemption shall terminate and the cesspool  
27 shall be replaced by June 30, 2015.

28 **23-19.15-9. Notice to remove and replace cesspools.** -- (a) The owner of any cesspool  
29 who has not complied with the requirements pursuant to this chapter shall be in violation of this  
30 chapter and subject to enforcement action by the department in accordance with chapters 17.1 and  
31 17.6 of title 42 of the general laws.

32 (b) Notwithstanding the above provisions, the director may require the abandonment and  
33 replacement of any cesspool with an approved ~~ISDS~~ OWTS prior to the dates specified in  
34 ~~subsection 23-19.15-6(a) § 23-19.15-6(b)~~ if the cesspool is a large capacity cesspool as defined

1 pursuant to applicable federal regulations governing underground injection control (UIC)  
2 facilities.

3 SECTION 2. Chapter 23-19.15 of the General Laws entitled "The Rhode Island Cesspool  
4 Act of 2007" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

5 **23-19.15-12. Cesspool removal and replacement requirements at property transfer.**

6 = (a) Any cesspool found to be serving a building or use subject to sale or transfer shall be  
7 removed and replaced with an OWTS or the building served by the cesspool shall be connected to  
8 a public sewer system within twelve (12) months of the date of sale or transfer.

9 (b) Should the manner of wastewater disposal be unknown, an inspection shall be  
10 conducted to determine if a cesspool is present on the property. This inspection shall be done by a  
11 system inspector prior to the time of sale or transfer.

12 (c) Pursuant to § 5-20.8-13, every contract, for the purchase and sale of real estate which  
13 is or may be served by a private cesspool, shall provide that potential purchasers be permitted a  
14 ten (10) day period, unless the parties mutually agree upon a different period of time, to conduct  
15 an inspection of the property's onsite sewage system in accordance with procedures required by  
16 the department in § 23-19.15-5(a), before becoming obligated under the contract to purchase.

17 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- THE RHODE ISLAND CESSPOOL ACT OF  
2007

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1           This act would amend the Rhode Island cesspool act of 2007 including replacing  
2 individual sewage disposal systems with onsite wastewater treatment systems and would require  
3 cesspool removal or replacement upon the transfer of the property where the cesspool is located  
4 under certain circumstances.

5           This act would take effect upon passage.

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