

# State pushes septic tanks further away from lakes

Friends of Lake Keowee Society officials welcome new standards

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**SENECA** — Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS) officials are embracing new state health department rules that would add distance between septic systems and lakes.

The Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) code regulating septic systems, which had not been updated in 22 years, increases setbacks from 50 feet to 75 feet.

The DHEC revision also set aside an additional 50 percent of the drain field area for possible repairs. Currently 100 percent is required for commercial drain fields but none for residential. Furthermore, the new rules call for septic system installation permits to

expire after five years.

FOLKS Executive Director Ben Turetzky said the organization had long called for greater setbacks for septic systems around Lake Keowee but did not have scientific test data to back its demands until DHEC paid for a study to be done in the Lowcountry three years ago.

The study found that nitrates appeared in the soil downslope of some drainfields up to 65 feet from the edge of the field. Turetzky said this meant that with the current 50-foot setback, it was possible for nutrients to seep into a water body like Lake Keowee.

Bill Graham, president of FOLKS — a group dedicated to preserving Lake Keowee and its watershed for future generations — said the organi-

zation has been closely working with DHEC to do a similar study around Lake Keowee.

"DHEC has agreed to contract for such a study and is currently developing the scope of work," Graham said.

Unlike the study process in the Lowcountry, where test holes were punched at various intervals downslope in the sandy soil, Graham said DHEC would have to take into account the different soil compositions in the Upstate.

Leonard Gordon, director of Onsite Wastewater Management for DHEC, said the revised setback standards would apply to new septic systems

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and not to systems already permitted by DHEC.

Gordon said DHEC receives about 25,000 applications to install septic systems each year and issues some 19,000 permits annually.

The new regulations would be enforced statewide.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers does not have setback regulations at Lake Hartwell, but no one is allowed to build on public property around the federally protected lake.

Jennifer Small, a spokesperson for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Savannah, Ga., said in cases where there is private property near Lake Hartwell, state setback rules would kick in.

Gordon said the new rules would go into effect in a week or two, except as they relate to wells and surface waters, which would begin Jan. 1, 2009. He said that would give the public time to become familiar with the new provisions.

Graham said the new DHEC

rules regulating septic systems near lakes were endorsed by the Home Builders Association of South Carolina and enacted by the State Assembly.

"Everyone agrees this is a significant missing element of the regulations," Graham said. "It is widely understood that for septic systems to work effectively and prevent deterioration of surface water quality, they must be designed properly, sited properly and installed properly," Graham said.