

## **'AFTER THE FLUSH' SEPTIC SYSTEM HOMEOWNER EDUCATION PROGRAM**

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About 30% of Florida's population relies on septic systems to treat and dispose of household wastewater. This translates to 2.6 million systems discharging approximately 426 million gallons of wastewater per day to underlying soil and groundwater. On average, septic systems remove 30% of nitrogen flowing into them and are identified as important sources of N to groundwater particularly when improperly sited or failing. If septic systems contribute at least 20% of the N load in areas with a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), a septic system remediation plan goes into place. This includes connecting homes to sewer systems and replacing conventional systems with advanced N-removal technology, both of which are costly for local governments and residents.

In response, UF/IFAS Extension agents and research faculty are developing a septic system educational program called "After the Flush". The program is a 'Septics 101' for residents, aimed to increase knowledge about septic system function and best practices, advanced onsite N-removal technology, and connections between septic systems and water quality. It addresses septic system regulations established by the 2016 Florida Water Bill. The program responds to needs identified by UF/IFAS Extension agents in a 2017 survey concerning septic system education. Of 87 respondents, 55 agents (63%) were interested in printed and online information to share with clients, 34 (39%) were interested in teaching residents about connections between septic systems and potential water quality impacts, and 26 (30%) were interested in hosting or co-teaching workshops on systems and how to properly maintain them.