WHY NOT TO SEWER

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Here are thirteen propositions that should certainly be on the table whenever a community faces pressure to sewer.

1. The suggestion that the pollution from septic systems is somehow greater than the pollution created by sewers is a deception. Nothing in a septic tank ever comes close to the horror that is created by sewers.

2. The moment sewers are laid, both the quantity and the range of polluting materials entering the water will skyrocket.

3. That in sewage which is harmful to life is not the human excreta: it is everything else. It is the industrial chemicals, wastes from hospitals, non-point-source runoff, etc., etc., *ad nauseum.* The real evil is the mixing of all these disparate materials, for when they are mixed, they form new compounds unknown, unpredictable, and a threat to life.

4. Treating sewage is no improvement over not treating it: the awful mix of matter is either in the sewage effluent or in the sludge. Either way it will cause damage to life. Treatment is nothing more than moving the poisonous problem—from the water to the land. And note that the better the treatment, the worse the sludge will be—and the more of it there will be.

5. To make a septic system as harmful as a sewer, you would have to turn it into a sewer.

6. Sewage treatment is at best a dreadful mistake, at worst a vast scam serving the engineering corporations that lay the pipes and the development interests that follow on the heels of the pipers.

7. Separation of wastes at their source is the key to recycling.

8. On-site waste systems are crucial to the source-separation of wastes.

9. A key virtue of the on-site septic system is its susceptibility to future improvement. You can divert the washing machine effluent for use and purification as irrigation water. You can take all your washwater (greywater) out of the septic system and use it all for irrigation of your garden. You can get rid of your flush toilet (that seemingly wonderful device that started us on the sewering route to begin with) and put in a compost toilet and with that single act keep 80% of the nitrogen from heading toward the groundwater.

10. What is needed—locally, nationally, and globally—are: tax incentives and regulations that support and stimulate the use of on-site systems; the knowledge about source separation versus mixing-and-then-fixing of wastes; and ultimately the introduction of systems that allow real recycling.

11. As an exercise in consciousness, try only using the word "waste" as a verb, never as a noun: consider that nothing is "waste" until we waste it. To waste any material is to put it in the wrong place. Mixing materials that become unusable when so mixed is a form of putting them in the wrong place.

12. The Clean Water Act is a sewering act, not an act to protect water: sewering concentrates pollution in the water; sewering moves pollution from one body of water to another; sewage treatment moves pollution from the water to the land.

13. Of course, it should go without saying—perhaps some day it will?—that water should never be used as a medium for the transportation of any wastes.

Therefore?

Therefore #1: don't sewer

Therefore #2: separate wastes at the source, treat wastes on-site, compost whatever you can compost (excreta, food residues), and reuse whatever you can on site (greywater, all composted matter), thereby redeeming from the world of the wasted the resources that should never have been allowed to be other than resources.