LINDBLOOM

Sewage Disposal Design 1115 High Street, Suite 10 Auburn, CA 95603

Placer County's Sewage Ordinance reads as follows:

"In known or suspected areas of high seasonal groundwater or perched water the Division will require that soil profiling be performed during the wettest time of the year to evaluate conditions that could adversely impact system performance."

-Chpt. 23 A.

This is what is commonly called wet weather testing. Many of the properties where this testing is required are located in the Loomis Basin where shallow seasonal groundwater is a known problem. When soil mantle testing is conducted during the dry time of year, we generally don't see groundwater so we have to look for indicators that water is present in the winter. These indicators generally consist of one or more of the following: sudden changes in soil structure, the depth of tree roots, and most importantly, soil color. Soil color is important because soils that are saturated for significant amounts of time each year change color. They generally looked "washed out", dull, gray. This is called soil mottling. It is due to the soil chemistry which changes in saturated environments. Once these soil colors change, it's important to note that they don't change back if the soil hydrology changes.

We often conduct soil mantle testing on properties that have been heavily irrigated. Cattle ranches for example, that are being converted to residential areas. As you might expect, we generally observe soil mottling on these properties because the irrigation has created saturated soil conditions. It has been the Health Department's policy to assume that soil mottling always indicates a groundwater problem unless the property owner proves otherwise through a winter test. This has even been the policy when we are testing on the top of a hill or on the side of a steep hill. In such situations, common sense tells you that the soil mottling is present due to the historic irrigation not because of a groundwater problem.

I would like to see this policy changed. I'm not recommending an Ordinance revision because it doesn't seem that the Ordinance requires the current policy. I would just like the County inspectors to feel they have the freedom to use their judgment in the field.

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