

- SUBJECT:** Continuing the On-site Wastewater Treatment Research Council
- COMMITTEE:** Environmental Regulation — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Chisum, Bonnen, Kuempel, Uher, Bosse, Dukes, Geren, Howard, Zbranek
0 nays
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 26 — 30-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar
- WITNESSES:** (*On House companion bill, HB 525:*)
For — Raymond Anderson, Harris County

Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** The 71st Legislature in 1989 created the On-site Wastewater Treatment Research Council to promote solutions to sewage problems and to conduct projects to lower the cost of waste disposal using on-site systems. The 72nd Legislature in 1991 extended the council until September 1, 2001. Set up under Health and Safety Code, chapter 367, the council administers the on-site wastewater treatment research account in general revenue, funded by a \$10 fee on each application for a septic tank permit. The council may accept grants and donations from other sources to supplement the fee revenue and may award competitive grants for demonstration projects aimed at improving the quality of wastewater treatment and reducing the cost to customers. The council's 11 members, appointed by governor, represent home builders, lot developers, engineers, scientists, consultants, regulators, and the public. The council is due to be abolished September 1, 2001.
- DIGEST:** CSSB 828 would extend the On-Site Wastewater Treatment Research Council until September 1, 2005, and make it subject to review by the Sunset Advisory Commission.
- The bill also would authorize the council to award competitive grants for applied research and demonstration projects to improve or provide on-site wastewater treatment at multiple residential sites. Grant eligibility would be

restricted to projects in an area with not more than 100 residential lots, served by failing on-site wastewater treatment systems. The council would have to adopt eligibility requirements for the grants, including the maximum number of residential sites that a project could include.

This bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Texas has a serious shortage of water and wastewater services. The shortage is more severe than the Legislature initially expected when it created the council in the late 1980s. Approximately 1 million Texans are without adequate water and wastewater services. The council helps these areas to improve those services and to address issues such as soil quality that can affect on-site treatment systems and should be continued.

Economically disadvantaged areas, in particular, benefit from the council. The council has funded projects to develop innovative systems to treat wastewater from individual homes or groups of homes in the colonias. The council continues to fund development of technologies and systems that are inexpensive and require little maintenance.

Texas needs the council to protect natural resources and the public health. Improperly treated wastewater poses an environmental threat to soil, ground water, and water bodies, and threatens public health. Lack of adequate potable water is also a public health issue.

The council recently has focused on increasing training opportunities. It has helped to fund on-site wastewater training centers in Bryan, Weslaco, and El Paso. These facilities complement continuing education courses offered by the Texas Engineering Extension Service and provide hands-on opportunities to observe how to build and install a variety of on-site wastewater treatment systems.

Continuing the council would cost the state no money. The council is funded by a \$10 fee collected each time a septic tank is installed.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The council should not be continued. Such a small grant program could be administered easily by the Texas Natural Resource Conservation

Commission, which could bring a larger pool of resources and technical knowledge to the program.

NOTES:

CSSB 828 is identical to the House companion bill, HB 525 by Bailey, which the House considered on May 10 and laid on the table subject to call.

The Senate engrossed version of SB 828 would have set the council's next sunset date in 2003.