

MOUNT PLEASANT WATERWORKS, SC

Enhancing Lives In SC: A Utility-led Septic Initiative

NEAA26 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP



National Environmental
Achievement
AWARDS



CLEAN WATER
CREDIT

120

families connected

\$360,000

in financial assistance



SEPTIC MAINTAINANCE
PROGRAM

1st utility-run septic
program in SC

32 enrollments since
July 2025 start



LOCAL
RESEARCH

Utility and academic
partnership to inform
septic management
in SC



SEPTIC
THINK TANK

A statewide forum to
brainstorm solutions





Member Spotlight: South Carolina Utility Pioneers Comprehensive Septic Management Program to Protect Public Health

Mount Pleasant Waterworks (MPW) has launched South Carolina's first comprehensive utility-led septic management initiative, addressing a critical gap in public health and environmental protection that affects communities across the state.

In coastal Mount Pleasant, more than 1,200 families rely on septic systems to treat household wastewater. South Carolina has no laws requiring septic system maintenance or inspections, leaving aging systems vulnerable to failure. When septic systems fail, raw sewage can back up into homes or leak into yards and waterways. Emergency repairs cost families between \$500 and \$10,000, expenses many cannot afford.

MPW recognized this regulatory gap and took action, investing \$333,000 to help eliminate 40 failing septic systems and protect 95,000 residents. The utility developed two complementary programs to address the challenge.

The Clean Water Credit helps homeowners permanently eliminate septic systems by connecting to public sewer. Through partnerships with the Town of Mount Pleasant and Charleston County, eligible residents receive up to \$9,000 to offset connection costs. Since launching in 2024, the program has approved 121 applications and completed 40 connections, with 74 additional connections in process.

For families without access to sewer lines, the Septic System Maintenance Program provides affordable preventive care—regular inspections and pumping to keep systems functioning and prevent costly failures. Launched in January 2025, the program offers professional maintenance at just \$15 per month under a zero-profit model, with 19 customers already enrolled.

These programs are especially important for historically underserved communities, including culturally significant African American neighborhoods established before modern sewer infrastructure existed. Climate change intensifies the challenge, as more frequent flooding and rising groundwater tables increases septic system failure risks in coastal areas.

Beyond local solutions, MPW is driving statewide change. The utility co-founded the Septic Think Tank, bringing together universities, state agencies, and community organizations to develop policy reforms. MPW also leads the EPA-funded Solutions on Septic research project, creating risk assessment tools and developing recommendations for protective legislation.

By combining direct assistance with research and policy advocacy, Mount Pleasant Waterworks has created a replicable model for utilities facing similar challenges. The initiative demonstrates how proactive leadership can address regulatory gaps, protect vulnerable communities, and preserve environmental quality for future generations.