

FAQs from the NWGLDE

... All you ever wanted to know about leak detection, but were afraid to ask.

A Short History of the NWGLDE

In this issue's FAQs from the National Work Group on Leak Detection Evaluations (NWGLDE), we look back on how the work group got started back in 1993. Please note: The views expressed in this column represent those of the work group and not necessarily those of any implementing agency.

Q. How did the NWGLDE get its start?

A. USEPA set a December 22, 1990, deadline that required leak-detection equipment (other than interstitial, groundwater, and vapor monitoring) to detect 0.1 gph (annual test) and 0.2 gph (monthly test) leaks with a probability of detection of 0.95 and a probability of false alarm of 0.05. The agency also wrote several protocols that manufacturers could use to prove that their equipment met this standard. When Alabama's UST program started receiving equipment evaluations, staff members noticed that some were not performed strictly in accordance with the USEPA protocols. They came to the realization that there was no system in place to make sure these evaluations were performed properly. Therefore, Alabama's UST program made it a point to review the evaluations and not allow the use of equipment in the state if the protocol was not performed properly. This resulted in the formation of a list of Alabama-recognized leak-detection equipment.

It occurred to Curt Johnson, supervisor of the Alabama UST program at the time, that if other states became aware of this same problem, there was the potential that 50 states would be reviewing these same evaluations and there could possibly be 50 lists of recognized leak-detection equipment! This seemed like a very inefficient and potentially very confusing situation. While attending a regional USEPA meeting Johnson approached Lisa Lund, then Director of USEPA's Office of Underground Storage Tanks (OUST), and presented her with a plan to set up a national work group that would review the evaluations and prepare a list of equipment that was properly evaluated and that could be used by all the states. Lund liked the idea, and formation of the work group began. Curt Johnson and David Wiley of OUST worked out the details, such as number of people in the group and member representation.

At the 1993 Annual UST/LUST National Conference in San Antonio, Texas, prospective members were polled to determine the date and location of the group's first official meeting. As a result, the first meeting took place in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 4, 1993. This location was chosen so that the work group could visit Midwest Research and Ken Wilcox Associates, the companies that performed the majority of the equipment evaluations at that time. During the first meeting, rules were established and the name National Work Group on Leak Detection Evaluations was chosen.

The original work group members were Curt Johnson (Alabama), who was and still is the Chair; Lamar Bradley (Tennessee), current Vice Chair; David Wiley (OUST);

Tony Ritcherson (Alabama); Allen Martinets (Texas); Russ Brauksiek (New York); Randy Nelson (Region 7 USEPA); Harold Scott (Region 10 USEPA); Beth DeHaas (Maine); Shahla Farahnak (California); and Mike Kadri (Michigan). At this first meeting, the list format had to be determined. California, Region 10 EPA, Alabama, and several other states all had lists at that time. The NWGLDE decided that the California list had the best format, so with California's blessing, the group began using the California format and continues to use that format today.

Now that it has been 16 years since the beginning of the NWGLDE, it appears that the concept has been very successful in providing the leak-detection evaluation information that USEPA and states need—without the necessity of every state having to review every evaluation. Also, through the years, the group has received comments from leak-detection-equipment vendors saying that they are very pleased with the concept of the NWGLDE, because instead of dealing with 50 states on each leak-detection-equipment issue, they just have to deal with the NWGLDE.

The big challenge of putting together that first NWGLDE List (copies of every edition of the List are available at NWGLDE.org) of 257 pages is well behind the NWGLDE. However, new challenges continue to arise, such as recent issues associated with the use and increases in the nonpetroleum composition of alternative fuels, innovations in leak-detection-equipment methods, and changes in state and federal underground storage tank rules. It appears that the NWGLDE may continue to help states address UST leak-detection issues for many years to come. ■

About the NWGLDE

The NWGLDE is an independent work group comprising ten members, including nine state and one USEPA member. This column provides answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) the NWGLDE receives from regulators and people in the industry on leak detection. If you have questions for the group, please contact NWGLDE at questions@nwglde.org.

NWGLDE's Mission:

- Review leak-detection system evaluations to determine if each evaluation was performed in accordance with an acceptable leak-detection test method protocol and ensure that the leak-detection system meets USEPA and/or other applicable regulatory performance standards.
- Review only draft and final leak-detection test method protocols submitted to the work group by a peer review committee to ensure they meet equivalency standards stated in the USEPA standard test procedures.
- Make the results of such reviews available to interested parties.