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Health task force completes work on community rules revision

FLATWOODS – A task force made up of state and county health officials, the Division of Labor, the state fire marshal and industry representatives completed work Tuesday on the first comprehensive rewrite of manufactured home community rules since they were enacted in 1971.

The task force, created by the Department of Health and headed by Fred R. Barley, assistant director of the Public Health Sanitation Division, now is prepared to tackle a second series of regulations dealing with community park construction.

The group resumes its deliberations June 9 at Flatwoods.

Industry is represented by Kevin Wilfong of Fairmont, co-president of the West Virginia Housing Institute Inc. and a community owner; and Frank and Ruby Sellers, owners of Shawnee Mobile Home Park at Saint Marys and a larger park at Boaz.

WVHI contacted all communities in the state to notify them of the formation of the task force by the state.

The proposed revisions approved Tuesday substantially reduce the amount of inspection work that must be done by county sanitarians in their regulation of manufactured home communities. It properly assigns duties to the agencies that should be handling them.

The original rules had been the state's initial attempt at regulating the industry. Many of the rules became archaic in the more than 30 years that have elapsed since their issuance, or the duties subsequently were assigned to other agencies by later legislative acts.

"It has been great to work with individuals who are impacted by the Mobile Home Park Rule, 64CSR40," Barley said. "Input from industry, private operators, state and local health department personnel, the State Department of Labor and the State Fire Marshal's office has been fruitful.

"Everyone has had an opportunity to discuss concerns and possible methods to address those concerns," Barley said. "I think with any rule or regulation, it is best to speak with one voice. This combined task force has allowed this to happen. We have recommended streamlining the Rule. The fact that we now refer to it as the Manufactured Home Community Rule shows that we are modernizing it as well."

Mrs. Sellers said she is extremely pleased with the task force's work.

"We are getting down to where we are eliminating the red tape," Mrs. Sellers said. "We are working very close together. The lines of communications are open. They want input from everyone and they are saying, 'Why are we doing this? Is this really necessary? Are we trying to make it too complicated?'"

Barley is taking the proposed revisions of the first part of the regulations to an internal liaison committee within the Health Department for review on May 1.

The aim is eventually to send the entire revised package to the Legislature as an agreed-to bill to update all the rules dealing with manufactured housing communities.

WVHI will post the proposed changes on its website at www.wvhi.org.