



# How to Work With Legislators

Making sure legislators and other policy makers are informed and educated about SWCDs is extremely important for us to stay a healthy and thriving organization. Each soil and water conservation district board member and staff person can and should play a role in this outreach. Here are a few helpful tips for working with legislators.

## **1. Personal Contact: Personal meetings will not be forgotten.**

The best time for personal contact with your local legislator is when he or she is home in the district. Your opportunity for meaningful discussion diminishes during the busy legislative session. Once in St. Paul, they lose control over their schedules. However, if you come to St. Paul to meet with them, make sure you have an appointment. If you do not, nine times out of ten you will not be able to visit with them.

When meeting with them, be sure to address them appropriately and with respect. Resist attempts at humor. And do not threaten them! Name the issue. Identify your concerns and suggested action. Know what you want from the legislator and ask them. Remember to be concise, use 10 words or less to introduce your topic.

If you have a fact sheet, it should be one page only. Provide visuals and bullet points.

Always send a thank you note, address their questions and offer future help.

## **2. Letters: Letters are best, e-mail is often ignored.**

Well written letters are invaluable and quick. Most legislators read mail from their constituents first so be sure to identify yourself. To be most effective letters should be brief and neat, one page only and typed. Keep your letter to one topic and simplify your point. Everything you say should support your point. Outline your concerns and suggested action.

Explain to them why they should care and how will it impact their district. Offer to be of further assistance and to provide additional information if needed.

Do not send postcards or form letters. Do not send petitions.

*Remember a few letters on a single subject from constituents to a legislator makes an impact. It is the most important grassroots tool if you do not have a personal relationship with a legislator.*

## **3. Phone Calls: You do not have to be an expert, you just have to care.**

Phone calls are effective during the height of legislative session before an important committee or floor vote. Sometimes when you call, you will simply speak to a legislative assistant who will be tallying the number of calls on an issue.

You may or may not get a phone call back, but you should have a few basic facts. The most important thing to tell them is why you want them to vote for or against an issue.

## **4. Minnesota State Legislature Home Page: [www.leg.state.mn.us](http://www.leg.state.mn.us)**

Here you are linked to the House and Senate Home Pages. You can send an email (although it is not recommended) from here. You can check on legislation and bill status. Get House and Senate schedules and publications. You can link to Legislative Commissions and go to Other Government Agencies to link to the Board of Water and Soil Resources, Department of Natural Resources, Finance and other state agencies.

Bookmark this site as a great way to stay tuned to the Legislative session.

**Good luck and thank you for your efforts**