

## Both slips and gains evident in 09

It's easy to think of 2009 as one vast left-wing ignominy. The public option sank like Balloon Boy. Time named Bernanke "Man of the Year." Obama decided to send more troops to Afghanistan. Copenhagen was, of course, officially scheduled to be ignored.

Even on a molecular level, the year was an embarrassment. Due to a Clinton-era pesticide company's half-brained weed-be-gone project, significant quantities of lead suddenly showed up in the White House slow-food project. Later, NASA claimed to have found water on the Moon. All the way from Houston, you could smell the pork being hurled at outer space.

Closer to home, policies to be proud of actually gained ground. Santa Fe's living-wage law remained strong. A new green-building code was enacted. Water was allowed to flow in the Santa Fe River. A major rebate program for rooftop water harvesting was also put into place for all Sangre de Cristo customers.

My favorite Santa Fe success story for 2009, like those mentioned above, sprang from city hall. The tale is a great example of the importance of any community's "invisible structures," to use a permacultural term. Given sustainability-based decisions by government, sustainable societies will be much easier to create.

I had called with bad news: "The city made a huge mistake when it formulated a checklist for handing out permits for cistern systems. As of today, only plumbers can conduct the installation. Mr. Mayor," I explained, "the problem is two-fold. Plumbers typically don't install cisterns, and most reputable contractors who do install cisterns aren't plumbers."

"Thanks," Coss replied. "There has to be an easy way to straighten this out."

Turns out he was right. Within a week, the city's one-year pilot program to obtain a permit for a cistern installation was amended to allow other experienced contractors to harvest rain. This list includes drainage-control contractors and



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"specialty" contractors, who must prove a minimum of two years of experience with the design and installation of cistern systems.

Other parts of the cistern-permitting process will need to be improved, but it's great to know that the city is already planning for these changes with their concept of a year-long trial period. The Land Use Department has expressed hope that the remaining nine months of the pilot can be spent collecting data, so that the overall process can be significantly improved by late September.

We are talking about the potential liability of thousands of gallons of water, so it is wise to protect the public by requiring a permit for cistern installations, but it is also inspiring to realize that, at the leadership level, the city understands the hard reality of job loss in this community. Putting experienced people out of a green job would have made little sense in these challenging times.

Since I have a few projects that I will soon be working through the city's new system, I'll try to keep you posted here at "Permaculture in Practice," but feel free to check out recent updates at my new blog at [www.harvesttherain.com](http://www.harvesttherain.com).

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