With the recent foreclosure crisis and the rise of housing affordability problems, concerns around substandard and dilapidated homes may have waned or been pushed into the background. Indeed, long-term efforts to improve housing conditions have resulted in dramatic reductions in the most egregious housing deficiencies.

But, a large number of homes without working toilets are located in rural and small town areas. In some rural communities, especially on Native American lands, the incidence of homes lacking basic plumbing can exceed 20 times the national rate.

While we may not want to acknowledge it, there are still hundreds of thousands of households in this country living in housing conditions typically associated with developing nations. In the complex world of housing provision and poverty, many of the issues and conditions we face feel intractable at times. But the elimination of the most egregious and basic of housing quality problems is not only achievable, but it is within reach. With a modicum of focused resources, effort and determination, we can eliminate the last outhouse.