

PRESS RELEASE

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**Citizen Committee Opposed to Dumping of Sewage Sludge on Agricultural Land Calls for Statewide Moratorium on Permits to Spread Sewage Sludge on Agricultural Lands.**

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“Protect Mill Canyon Watershed,” a citizen committee from Davenport, WA opposed to dumping of sewage sludge on agricultural land, has called for a statewide moratorium on pending and future permits to spread sewage sludge on agricultural lands. The Washington State Department of Ecology is the agency that issues the permits. The committee today launches a grassroots letter-writing campaign they hope will generate hundreds of email messages to Washington State Department of Ecology Director Maia Bellon and Washington State Governor Jay Inslee requesting a moratorium on any further “biosolids” permit approvals until a thorough review of the science is completed and the findings incorporated into re-worked regulations pertaining to sewage sludge disposal and land application in the state.

Residents who live in an area near Davenport, Washington called Mill Canyon feel threatened by proposals to spread municipal sewage sludge on nearly 900 acres of nearby agricultural land uphill from where they live, garden and farm. The area in question includes their natural watershed. Local citizens are alarmed and are organizing to prevent a permit application to dump the sludge from being approved. The sewage sludge would cause contamination of their drinking and irrigation water supplies. Soil containing sludge would mobilize via water and wind erosion and migrate into the canyon. Pollutant contaminants from the sludge would end up in the air from blowing dust, a condition that is common in the canyon, and settle in their lungs, on their soil and on their crops.

Canyon residents, with support from the Sierra Club, the Columbia Institute for Water Policy the Northwest Fund for the Environment, Safe Food and Fertilizer and the Cornucopia Institute have formed a committee called “[Protect Mill Canyon Watershed](#)” to publicize the crisis they are facing.

Not only do they demand that the permit application to apply sewage sludge in their “back yard” be denied, they are also demanding that Washington State Department of Ecology Director Maia Bellon and Washington State Governor Jay Inslee immediately impose a state-wide emergency moratorium on approving all pending permits for land application of sewage sludge until a thorough review of the science is completed and the findings incorporated into re-worked regulations pertaining to sewage sludge disposal and land application in the state.

They want the Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) to deny the pending permit application it currently has under consideration that would allow sewage sludge to be spread on neighboring land *and impose a state-wide moratorium* because:

- Hundreds of industrial, pharmaceutical and organic pollutant contaminants are known to be present in sewage sludge but are completely ignored by state regulators who routinely approve sewage sludge land application permits based solely on whether concentrations of only nine metals (Arsenic, Cadmium, Copper, Lead, Mercury, Molybdenum, Nickel, Selenium and Zinc) are within its arbitrarily-set parameters for those metals;
- There are virtually no controls in place to limit the introduction of any pollutant into municipal sewage systems. No sewage sludge regulatory regime could possibly make provisions to adequately protect the public and the environment from harm since it is impossible to know the exact composition of any given batch of sludge or the kinds or concentrations of pollutant contaminants it contains;
- Antibiotic resistant bacteria and mobile antibiotic resistance genes are present in sewage sludge. Sewage sludge is a conducive environment for bacteria to reproduce in, raising the threat of antibiotic resistant human pathogen strains developing in and migrating from sludge-treated soils into the environment putting human and non-human life at risk;
- Existing arbitrary, contradictory and inadequate regulations governing the land application of sewage sludge encourage the build-up of toxic heavy metals in soils in violation of state and federal law, especially when waste-derived fertilizers are used in conjunction with sewage sludge. The situation is compounded because testing soils for metals accumulation is not required and this could easily lead to unsafe and illegal concentrations, but no one would know;
- The Cornell Waste Management Institute Center for the Environment investigated alleged health incidents associated with land application of sewage sludges. “Symptoms of more than 328 people involved in 39 incidents in 15 states are described. Investigation and tracking of the incidents by agencies is poor. Only one of 10 EPA regions provided substantial information on the incidents in their region. Investigations, when conducted, focused on compliance with regulations. No substantial health-related investigations were conducted by federal, state, or local officials. A system for tracking and investigation is needed. Analysis of the limited data suggests that surface-applied Class B sludges present the greatest risk and should be eliminated,” the Cornell researchers reported;
- In the Mill Canyon permit application (as well as dozens of similar applications around the state), DOE erroneously certified that it has “determined that this proposal does not have a probable significant impact on the environment, [therefore an] environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required.” DOE based its determination on a flawed, incorrect and incomplete State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Checklist provided by the vendor seeking the permit. DOE failed to adequately scrutinize the submitted SEPA checklist. In making its determination, DOE also exhibited willful disregard of the science that has emerged in the decades since sewage sludge land application was initiated in the 1970’s. Environmental Impact Statements must be prepared for every General Permit for Biosolids Management;

- The requirement that the vendor develop a “groundwater protection plan” to monitor for any groundwater contamination resulting from sewage sludge application was improperly waived in the Mill Canyon permit application because an adequate, detailed hydrologic survey was not performed. Likely similar improper waivers have been granted in other permit applications around the state;
- Much of the land near Mill Canyon where sewage sludge is proposed to be deposited is perched above the canyon and its waterways. It is all prone to erosion. A large proportion of it is classified by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service as “Highly Erodible Land,” a classification that renders those areas prohibited for sludge application. Soil scientists warn that the area is the worst place to experiment with “biosolids” as a soil amendment;
- Numerous irregularities, omissions and incomplete responses are present in the permit application for land application of sewage sludge near Mill Canyon which call into question DOE’s capacity and desire to adequately administer the entire state sludge program in fulfillment of its mission to “protect, preserve and enhance Washington’s environment for current and future generations.”

Links:

Protect Mill Canyon Watershed has compiled a document that details their objections to the permit application which is available on their website, here:

<http://www.protectmillcanyon.org/details-regarding-protect-mill-canyon-watersheds-objections-land-application-sewage-sludge-neighboring-farm/>

Protect Mill Canyon Watershed website: <http://www.protectmillcanyon.org/>

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