

Do You Know What Sewage Sludge Is?

It Affects Your Food, Water and Health



Across from Sylvan Elementary School Snow Camp, NC 10/2009

What is Sewage Sludge?

The Federal Clean Water Act defines sewage sludge as a "pollutant".[33 U.S.C. 1362(6)] Harper-Collins Dictionary of Environmental Science describes it as: "A viscous, semisolid mixture of bacteria, and virus-laden organic matter, toxic metals, synthetic organic chemicals and settled solids removed from domestic and industrial waste water at sewage treatment plants."

What Is The Source?

Sewage sludge is a product of waste water treatment plant (WWTP) operations. It is the residual solids and semisolids filtered from wastewater. Anything flushed down the toilet or dumped down the drain from homes, hospitals, businesses & industries flows to the WWTP. Stormwater and leachate from municipal landfills also wind up at the WWTP.

Is Sewage Sludge Treated to Make it Safe?

Treatment plants are not equipped to remove the thousands of chemicals, metals, pharmaceutical drugs, viruses, bacteria and other toxic substances found in sewage sludge that can contaminate our food, water, soil and air.

Why is Sewage Sludge Spread on Farmlands?

Ocean dumping of sewage sludge was banned in 1988 when it was discovered sludge was destroying sensitive marine habitat. Land application of sewage sludge is now the least expensive method of disposal. WWTPs provide sewage sludge free of charge to farmers as fertilizer and pay the cost of spreading it. However, farmers are not told of the myriad toxic substances and pathogens found in sewage sludge.

Is This Legal?

Land application of sewage sludge is permitted by North Carolina state law following EPA guidelines. The program is administered by the N.C. Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Water Quality.

What are the Concerns?

There are reports of sewage sludge polluting groundwater, drinking wells and surface waters. Currently, there are permitted sites in critical watershed areas of municipal drinking water sources. Plants grown for human consumption and for animal feed are contaminated when grown on sludged fields. Animals are exposed to toxic substances when they graze on sludged fields. Sewage sludge has been shown to harm fish along with other aquatic organisms and poses a risk to public health.

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Sewage Sludge Facts

In Orange County, **4,300 acres** are currently permitted by the state to receive sewage sludge; 3,100 acres are under active permits. Approximately 300+ acres are added each year.

Over 24% of all cropland in Orange County receives sewage sludge. Additionally, many acres of grazing pastures receive sewage sludge. Orange County is **ranked 5th** among sludged counties in North Carolina; receiving sludge from Durham, RTP, Burlington, Chapel Hill/Carrboro, Hillsborough and Mebane.

Orange, Alamance and Chatham counties **each** receive over 22 million gallons of sewage sludge on their land **per year**.

Numerous local drinking water wells near sludged land are contaminated.

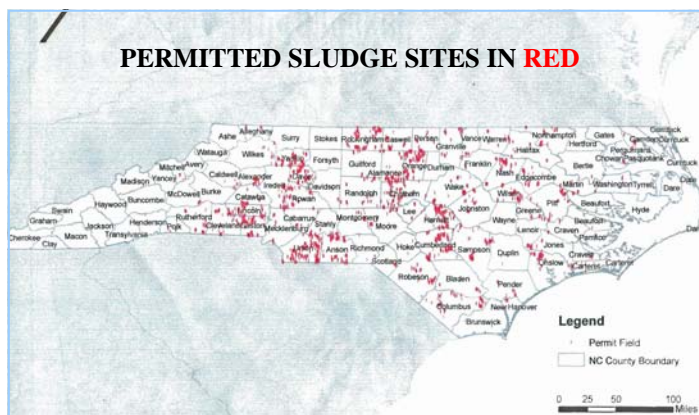
In 2008, spreading sewage sludge as fertilizer was associated with the deaths of hundreds of dairy cattle in Georgia.

In 2006, Dr. Ellen Harrison, researcher with Cornell Waste Management Institute, one of the nation's premier agricultural research institutions, stated that "spreading of Class B sewage sludge on farmlands should be banned immediately."

People living near sludged farms suffer from: abdominal bloating, jaundice, skin ulcers, MRSA infections, coughing, sneezing, sore throat, nausea, emphysema, arthritis, chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma, environmental COPD and sinusitis. [Archives of Environmental & Occupational Health, 2007; 62:1[5]].

SSAN is seeking safe alternatives to land application of sludge.

What You Can Do: purchase food from "sludge-free" companies (list at our website), use low toxicity household cleaners, stop buying anti-bacterial soap, purchase "sludge-free" fertilizers, re-evaluate your use of garden chemicals, become an active lobbyist. Join Sewage Sludge Action Network!



For More Information or to Volunteer

Sewage Sludge Action Network

A Chapter of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

Myra Dotson, Chair SSAN (919) 270-7534

Sue Dayton, BREDL (336) 525-2003

www.sewagesludgeactionnetwork.com

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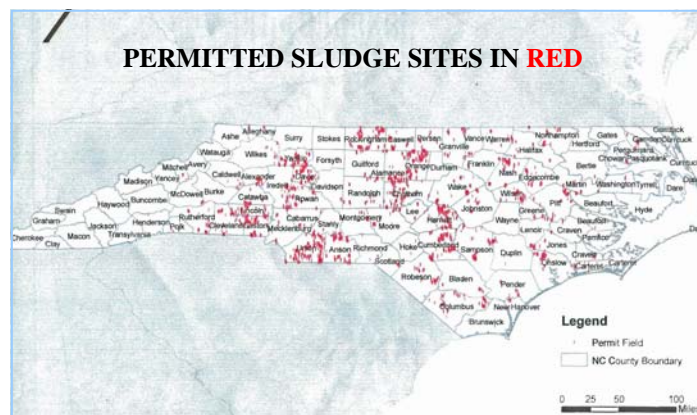
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