

DER Holds Hearing

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but the problem is, how do you implement the book? They admittedly don't have the manpower to go out and monitor the spread of sewage sludge or anything else."

The repermitting is being sought by Richard Lenci, owner of Ridgecrest Farm, whose mailing address is Womelsdorf. He currently has permits to apply human sewage sludge on 40 acres of his farm and 356 acres on a nearby farm owned by Melvin Gelsinger.

Neither Gelsinger, nor Lenci have telephone numbers listed, and could not be reached for comment.

The audience sat in rows of folding chairs, while four representatives of DER sat behind a long table. Off to the side, a stenographer recorded the meeting.

The sewage sludge operation on the two farms has been cited several times during the past four years, mainly related to odor problems, but also to inappropriate application procedures, according to Mike Maioli, waste operations supervisor out of the DER Reading District Office.

Along with Maioli at the table, representing DER were Don Korzeniewski, a facility specialist, Joe Subzda, DER waste engineer, and Alica Harris, a DER community and environmental relations employee.

According to Subzda, as part of a regular repermitting process, DER sends notices of the reapplication to the local municipal officials and to county officials. As part of the notice, those local gov-

ernment officials may request meetings of hearings.

Robert Manbeck, township administrator, made that request and set up the meeting.

Manbeck, a farmer also, started off the meeting addressing DER and the crowd about his concerns with the current operation.

He said he is concerned that the Gelsinger Farm does not have a conservation plan filed with the local USDA Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), a requirement by DER for a sewage sludge permit.

Also Manbeck said several people have called him and reported having bad wells which he said the community suspects may be caused by the sludge spreading.

Other concerns included the lack of direct and regular inspections by DER.

And the odor.

According to neighbor reports, the sludge hauling has been occurring daily, and at night, without a 24-hour break between loads in many cases.

The husband of one family said he lives downwind and in a valley where air movement frequently stagnates. He said his family is regularly assaulted by the smell and can't escape, except to leave their home.

The sludge comes from the Philadelphia area and is hauled to Berks County for application.

The choices for most sewage treatment plant operators is to incinerate the sludge or find a farm where it can be spread. Spreading it on a farm is much cheaper than

burning it.

In the Philadelphia region, farmland is at a premium, if available at all.

The type of waste dumping at the two farms is classified by DER as Agricultural Utilization. According to Subzda, the agricultural utilization is the most restrictive for heavy metals and other contaminants. It also generally receives the least amount of sludge.

By regulation, the amount of sludge put on the land is not to exceed the amount that crops are able to use. The crops are then to be removed from the site.

As an example, Subzda said it wouldn't be unusual for three tons of sludge, on a dry-weight basis, to be dumped on an acre of suitable farmland per year, under the agricultural utilization permit.

He said that the weight of the soil on an acre of land, down to a depth of 6 to 7 inches, is about 2 million tons. Compared to that, three tons of sludge per year is a light load, he said.

However, during a telephone conversation on Thursday, Subzda said his use of three tons per acre should not be taken to mean that this is the rate of application at the two farms.

Subzda said that while he considered three tons per acre to be light load, other factors and limits are taken into account, not just the bulk.

However, under the DER permitting system, those being monitored submit their own test results, soil samples and yearly dumping records.

Maioli said that approximately

15 inspectors (he wasn't sure about the specific number of inspectors) cover the 15-county Central Region area. Those inspectors are to monitor all the sludge waste spreading currently permitted. There are more than 400 sites for agricultural utilization alone.

It would be difficult for a site to be inspected more than once a year, Maioli said.

In effect, DER depends on the sludge spreading operations to inform on themselves. There is no independent or unbiased testing performed on the sludge or the soils, or keeping track of how much is being dumped.

On Thursday Subzda said he could understand the complaints about the inspection systems.

The history of the two farms were initially permitted for the sludge dumping activity in 1987; the Ridgecrest Farm in March, Gelsinger farm in September.

The permitting was done by DER's Southeast Regional office, which covers the Philadelphia/Norristown area which generates the sludge. The person who oversaw the permitting no longer works for DER.

Because of some later legislation, those permits are only good for five years. Those areas must apply for repermitting. The two farms current permits expire in April 1993. If they are repermited,

the new permits would be valid for 10 years, or until the ground levels of heavy metals reached maximum allowable levels.

Subzda said, for example, 75 pounds of copper per acre is one such limit.

Maioli worked for the Southeast Region when the permits were originally granted, but was not involved with those farms.

Subsequent promotion to supervisor in the Central Region and the restructuring of districts, left Maioli in charge of Berks County and the two farms.

According to Maioli, "I got some calls in 1988 and investigated them."

By telephone Thursday, Maioli first said he couldn't answer specific questions because he didn't have the information in front of him.

After requests for more specifics, he eventually pulled the files and reviewed the violations, they included: March 1988 — spreading on fields frozen or during periods of rain; April 1988 — storing sludge onsite without prior approval and sewage on site was not properly stabilized (treated to a pH of 12 with lime); March 1990 — failure to incorporate sludge within 24 hours.

"We had meetings and correspondence with them. We had come

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Innerst Farm

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from erosion, and helps carve deeper channels for trout by keeping the flow confined within the narrow streambed. A special crossing installed in the stream allows the cattle to pasture on the creek's far side without disturbing the banks.

Local Boy Scouts helped place some of the barrier rocks, donated by the County Line Quarry. Bob Kinsley Construction donated equipment use, and various agencies helped design and implement the stream erosion control measures.

"We'll probably add another

couple hundred yards to it this year," George said of the joint efforts toward the stream's preservation and improvement.

Another addition planned is the construction of another housing facility incorporating additional freestalls and updated feeding systems for total mixed rations.

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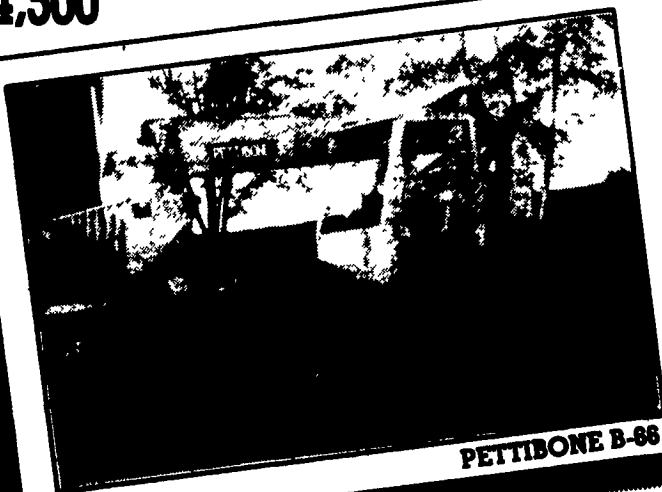


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