

DER, Ag Department Study Milkhouse Waste

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The entire effort is one of understanding the composition of a substance that is otherwise thought to be benign, according to spokespeople from DER, PSU, and the state Department of Agriculture.

According to Rider, the as-of-yet uncompleted project is a result of complaints to DER about malfunctioning on-lot, underground waste water treatment systems (septic/distribution box and drainfield) on farms, and a possible link of blockage in those failed systems to the wastes coming from milkhouse waste water.

While the specific cause of the problem with failed systems was blockage, it was not apparent what was causing the problem, according to Rider.

It was clear however, that no person or agency had any comprehensive data on the components of milkhouse waste water, or how much waste is actually being released into "subsurface disposal systems."

The phrase, "subsurface disposal systems," is self-defining and includes the traditional septic tank and drainfield.

According to Rider, while DER had no prior direct contact with milkhouse waste water, from what personnel were told about milkhouses, the agency assumed it would be looking at a substance that could possibly be high in organic materials and nutrients (milk and milk solids), and unknown concentrations of detergents and acids.

However the agency was since informed that the situation was not comparable to a milk processing

plant.

Rider said that Stephen Spencer and Robert Graves, both with PSU dairy extension, helped him meet with representatives of the dairy industry, who directly or indirectly would be involved in the operation of dairy farms and milkhouses.

Rider said the consensus was that a closer look was needed as to the general composition of the material and what kinds of ranges of composition could be encountered in the field.

As a result of that meeting, it was decided that PDA field inspectors, already familiar with the farms and farmers, would collect the milkhouse waste samples from 35 representative dairies across the state.

DER agreed to pay for the sample analyses and to record and analyze the data.

The samples have already been gathered and the sample analyses are done, which means that the PDA has completed its portion of the effort, according to Tony Bizzarro, chief of the PDA Division of Milk Sanitation.

During a Wednesday telephone interview, Bizzarro said that PDA became involved because it had been dealing sporadically with some problems for some time.

Also, he Bizzarro said that agriculture officials wanted to avoid a confusing, and possibly duplications of effort through multi-agency involvement in the field.

He also said that while survey work is not the normal role of the state's 224 industry inspectors (who are certified by the Department of Agriculture), they were

asked to help with the survey.

Bizzarro said the farms chosen for involvement in the study were selected by the PDA based on type of operation and geographical location.

"We're trying to get some idea of what we have here," Bizzarro said about the milkhouse waste water. "The agriculture department contends that it is not a real problem. We've been looking at some of these for some time. As long as the (underground system) is operating, it doesn't cause a problem."

"But here back a while, there were some problems and some runoff," he said. "Anytime that did happen and came to our attention, we would tell them (the farmers) to repair it in some way, catch it and put into the manure pit, or expand the drainfield to a size needed to handle the flow of milkhouse waste water, Bizzarro said.

"When this did surface (DER's interest in milkhouse waste), we thought, maybe we ought to do a survey of the different systems," he said.

"Because there are so many of them out there (milkhouses) and for so many years, and we felt if we got involved we would have only one agency involved (in the sampling) instead of two agencies."

According to Bizzarro, the interagency agreement was that PDA would continue to look at the problem and pass on the samples it collected.

DER's role is to test all the sam-

ples, at a cost of several hundred dollars each, and enter the data and perform a computer-assisted analysis of milkhouse waste water.

PDA's role of selecting farms were based on the facts that while just about all dairies use bulk tank systems, there are still a number of dairy farmers using buckets to store and haul milk.

Therefore, 15 farms were selected which had pipelines and bulk tanks, 15 were selected with parlors and bulk tanks, and five were selected which use buckets.

Bizzarro said that in this way, DER would logically get more of a representative sample of the varying amounts and types of milk and milk solids, detergents and acids expected to be found in milkhouse waste.

A potential problem for dairymen would be if milkhouse waste water were to be considered as industrial waste, one of two definitions included under the state's Clean Water Act, according to Rider. (The other is household waste.)

Rider said that consideration and any fears from farmers should be quelled. In effect, he said that DER did not intend to treat pipe-

line cleaning water as industrial waste.

However, others outside of DER have suggested that the possibility for milkhouse waste receiving an industrial waste designation is real and uncomfortable to consider — it would impose a completely different set of rules and restrictions and testing upon dairymen.

However, all officials said they were confident that would not occur.

In fact Bizzarro said that DER has been very cooperative, and that he expects no major changes to normal operations.

"I think we have a very good cooperative feeling on this," Bizzarro said.

In the case that something is deemed needed to be done, it would only be done after consultation with PDA and leaders of the dairy industry, Bizzarro said.

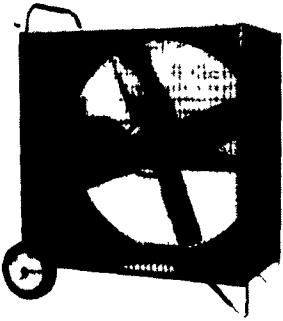
He said he sees a more likely scenario being that if a new milkhouse is to be built, that perhaps the "new (onlot sewage) system would be approved by somebody; if it's working, then let it go; and, if not working, then find alternatives."

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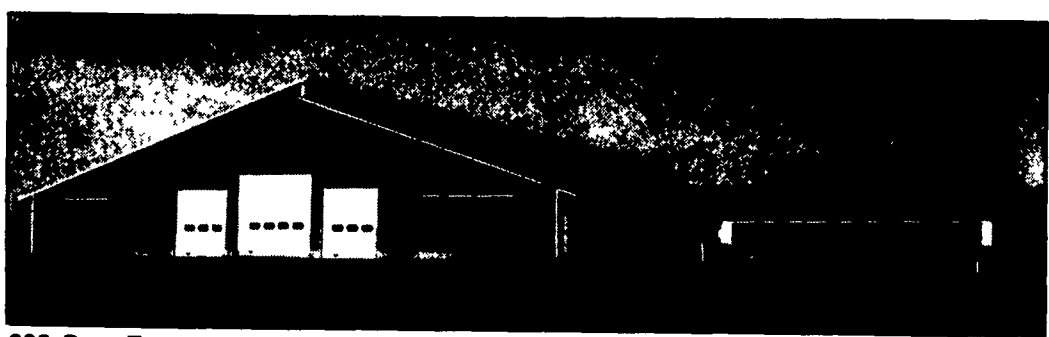
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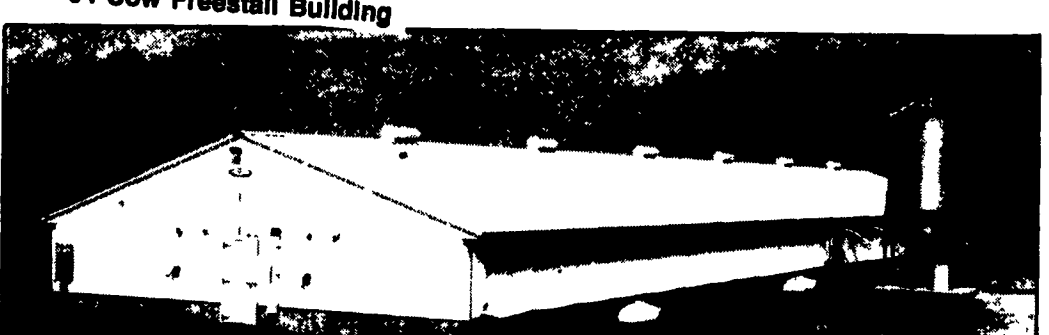
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