

Sinkholes — Potential Environmental Threats — Strain Farmers' Patience, Money

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SCS (now NRCS) standard and specification.

(As a result of recent USDA reorganization, the Soil Conservation Service is now called the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS.)

Many farmers, along with society as a whole, have learned the importance of protecting the environment. More than ever before, they are doing all they can to ensure water is not contaminated, soil is not lost, and hazardous material is properly disposed of.

But years ago, many farmers recount how their grandfather and father covered over old dump sites that once contained a sinkhole or two. Nothing was ever said. After all, a place was needed to put the trash.

Now, slowly, the importance of protecting the environment has — for want of a better expression — started to sink in. There are correct ways for dealing with sinkholes, if only farmers would take the time and learn.

But for now, dealing with the problems inherent when sinkholes occur continue. In light of the heavy precipitation that was the year of 1994, more and more sinkholes opened up all over the county and the state. Recently, a building in Allentown was demolished because a sinkhole opened up underneath it. In April this year, a sinkhole appeared on Rt. 422 near Lebanon. Another one, measuring 20 feet in diameter, opened up on Rt. 31 in Carroll County, Md., killing a 24-year-old man.

Sinkholes can appear on any property, residential or commercial. In an August 1993 issue of a local newspaper, there was a story about a sinkhole that had opened up, trapping a man planting at his mother's grave. Sinkholes are ubiquitous — they can happen

anywhere.

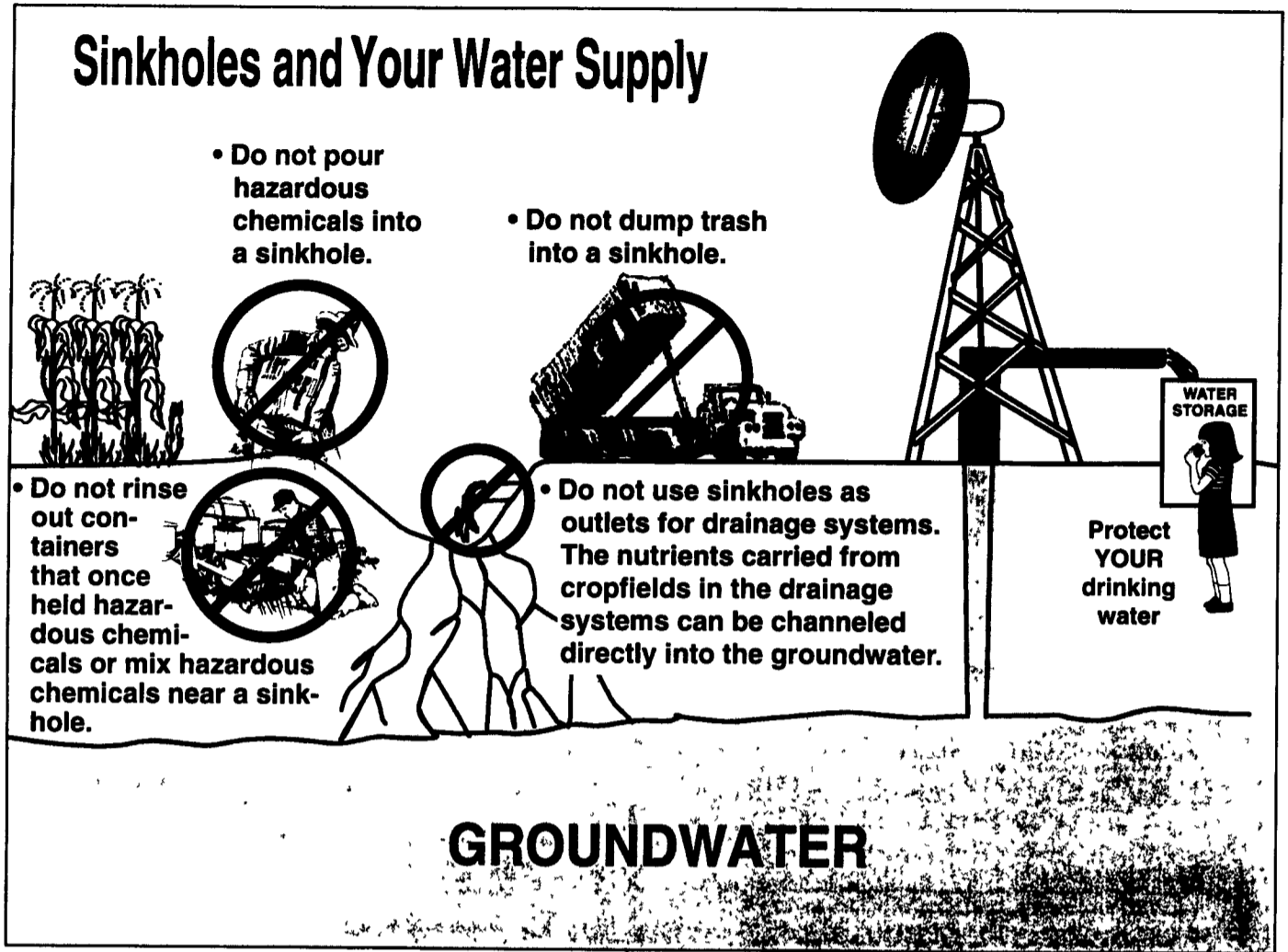
A small sinkhole even opened up recently at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center.

But many sinkholes open up in farm valleys.

"Sinkholes seem to occur more frequently along the base of mountain slopes where acidic runoff enters limestone valleys," said Bruce Benton, an NRCS geologist.

Benton was instrumental in helping put together the NRCS standard and specification for

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A typical sinkhole that has been used as a trash site. This can pose problems to groundwater.



Manure flows into this sinkhole. Sinkholes are direct conduits to groundwater — your drinking water.



This sinkhole in Clinton County was the subject of an 18-minute training video. For 10 years it was used as a dump site until it was repaired using SCS guidance.