

# Field Application Of Sewage Sludge Is Contentious Issue

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regulations which became effective Tuesday, a group called the Lancaster Heritage and Environment Alliance (LHEA) sponsored a meeting that was to be held 7 p.m. May 30 at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center in Lancaster.

According to Anne Goeke, president of LHEA, the LHEA consists of member organizations such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Citizens For Responsible Growth, the Conestoga Valley Association, the Historical Preservation Trust, Lancaster County Conservancy, the Sierra Club, the Donegal Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Muhlenberg Botanical Society, Lancaster Greens, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Lancaster Environmental Task Force.

The Lancaster Farmland Trust, also a member of LHEA, has abstained from participating in the sewage sludge meeting, but not out of protest, more to distance itself from the issue, according to Goeke.

Five speakers had been scheduled to speak — Tom Sweeney, a soil scientist involved with the DEP sewage sludge program (old and new); Dr. Tim Lutz, a geochemist with Westchester University of Pennsylvania; Hugh Kaufman, an employee of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); retired analytical chemist Stanford Tackett; and Jay Snyder, operator of the Ephrata Area Waste Water Treatment Plant.

They were scheduled to speak until later Thursday, when Snyder, who for several years has been a proponent of applying "biosolids" on local farmland, said he wasn't going to participate because he felt that LHEA stacked the speakers with discreditable oppositionists.

According to Snyder, he backed out of the lineup of speakers because he felt that the program was stacked against him as a prop-

onent of land application of sewage sludge.

He said that from an educational resume perspective he was not fairly matched against doctorate-holders and researchers; and he also said that the speakers who are known to oppose applying sewage sludge onto land were not credible spokespeople.

For example, he said he was opposed to sharing the stage with scheduled opposition speaker Hugh Kaufman, who works for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Washington DC. Snyder provided a copy of a 1996 letter from assistant EPA administrator Robert Perciaspepe that states that Kaufman represents only himself, and not the agency, on the issue of biosolids.

The letter reaffirms EPA's support of the regulations as protecting the safety of the environment, and emphasizes that the EPA regulations were created using science.

"Mr. Kaufman is an employee in EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response. He is not an employee of EPA's Office of Water which is responsible for the Agency's biosolids program," Perciaspepe stated in a late February 1996 letter to Dr. Richard Kuchenrither, president of the Water Environment Federation in Alexandria, Va.

"I assure you that Mr. Kaufman has not been authorized to present the Agency's views in this area and that his statements about the use and disposal of biosolids represent personal views and not those of the Agency."

That letter was made in response to a letter from Kuchenrither to the EPA stating concern for Kaufman's statements about sewage sludge dangers.

It must be noted, however, that Kuchenrither's non-for-profit organization has a mission, "to preserve and enhance the global water environment," and it has a contract with the EPA to produce educational fact sheets. It provided some on the beneficial uses of biosolids.

Snyder also said that scheduled speaker Stanford Tackett, who worked for the Indiana University of Pennsylvania as a researcher tracking down the availability and impact of lead in the environment, was also not the expert the meeting presented him to be.

Snyder had a copy of court

documents that comment negatively on Tackett's area of expertise with regard to its applicability to biosolids.

On the other hand, Tackett, as a doctor of analytical chemistry, spent years researching the toxic metal lead in its various forms in the environment.

And while Kaufman was not reached for comment, a member of one of the organizations involved with the alliance contacted Lancaster Farming this week, after becoming aware of the interest in publicizing the meeting.

According to K. Aubrey Hottell, with the Conestoga Valley Association, who is currently working on completing a bachelor's degree in science at Millersville University, she is vigorously opposed to applying sewage sludge as a beneficial soil amendment.

She said she suspects a conflict of interest by those, such as Snyder, whose livelihood directly benefits from being able to spread sewage sludge on farmland.

Snyder said that he suggested that a Penn State University Extension researchers sit in his stead as a speaker, though he said that wasn't accepted.

The issue is apparently contentious because both sides are able to claim the use of science to support their positions, and neither side has enough science to completely refute statements by the other side.

However, that's the nature of science. The scientific method doesn't allow for making absolute statements or conclusions without irrefutable proof.

At the same time, it depends on intuition and hypothesis in order to advance and begin and develop a proper investigation.

However the meeting ended, Goeke said it was known to be a topic worthy of investigation and debate, and one that had strong opponents and proponents.

She maintained that the only agenda of the LHEA was to provide a forum for both sides of the issue and subissues.

It also was to provide an opportunity for the state Department of Environmental Protection to present its new regulations concerning sewage sludge land applications.

Helen Moyer, a representative of the Lancaster League of Women

Voters, was to have served as panel moderator in the two-hour forum.

According to Sweeney, with DEP, he intended to discuss a little of the old program and the changes under the new program.

In brief, he said that the new program allows less permitting paperwork by the state, less submission to a state office of paperwork by the company applying sewage sludge, and higher limits of the heavy metals and chemicals of concern.

Sweeney explained that while the paperwork requirements for both the state and the regulated industry would be less, the requirement to keep documentation and to make it available to DEP upon demand, on site, would increase.

He said that the program changed departments under the DEP (which is only two years old and still undergoing some changes to tackle programs initiated under the old DER).

He said that since there are inspectors already in the field looking at treatment plants, that

they are to get the added responsibility of inspecting records for sludge applications and to make sure documentation is done properly.

The permits issued under the new system will be fewer, but the amount of information required will not decrease. There is expected to be no lessening of oversight by the state for keeping track of the farms involved, but each farm property won't have to be permitted separately.

The allowing of higher levels of heavy metals and other chemicals before land is no longer suitable to receive sludge is a reflection of federal standards set by the EPA. Sweeney explained that when Pennsylvania set its initial standards it didn't have the expertise and resources, or risk assessment analysis, that the EPA has had in developing its levels.

That potentially may allow a farm closed under the old system to be re-permitted, but Sweeney said there have been very few farms every closed down from receiving the set limit of metals.

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