

Subject: Re: Public Hearing on Burlington Sludge May 13
From: Efraín Anibal Ramirez-Aponte <ramuser@blast.com>
Date: Mon, 5 May 2008 19:20:06 -0400
To: ed.hardee@ncmail.net

I am a member of the Haw River Assy. Live in Pittsboro & I drink water from the Haw. I patronize local farmers markets & eat fruit & vegetables from sustainable markets in Chatham & Alamance counties, irrigated with ground water that may very well have been contaminated with toxic substances Efraín A. Ramirez

The problem. Each year the City of Burlington spreads millions of gallons of sewage sludge from its two wastewater treatment plants on farmlands in 6 counties in NC: Alamance, Chatham, Orange, Randolph, Guilford and Caswell. Sludge is given free to farmers to be used as fertilizer. In addition to nutrients, sludge contains an array of toxic substances that cannot be removed at wastewater treatment plants. These toxic substances pose a risk to our farmlands, our water resources, our environment and our health. Until a safer alternative for disposal of sewage sludge is found, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL) is advocating for better enforcement of the existing federal and state regulations with increased oversight by local governments.

No one knows when and where sludge is being spread! People have a right to know about what's being dumped next to their backyards that might hurt them. Right now, residents of counties where land application is taking place have no knowledge about when and where sewage sludge is being spread because the public isn't being notified. We're asking that NC Division of Water Quality publish a written public notice announcing new or renewed permits to spread sludge in local newspapers, on the NC Division of Water Quality website and in county libraries so that the public has an opportunity to comment and request a public hearing. This includes sending a written notification to residents living within a 1 mile-radius from fields getting spread with sludge.

Minimize people's exposure to pollutants! The majority of sewage sludge spread on farmlands is left on the surface soil. Wind and rain can transport sludge into the air and environment to affect the health of nearby residents. We're asking NC Division of Water Quality to disc sludge into the soil to lessen exposure to sludge and set up a help-line for citizens to report illnesses, nuisances and potential violations regarding sludge applications. Current regulations require that public access to private fields being spread with sludge is restricted for 30 days and one calendar year for public lands being spread with sludge, but

very few signs, if any, are seen restricting access. Visible signs should be posted limiting public access to fields receiving sludge with information on how to contact NC Division of Water Quality in the event of an illness, accident or potential violation.

Establish greater setbacks from private wells and surface waters. Sewage sludge has made people sick, and contaminated groundwater, private wells, and surface waters in NC. Chemicals in wastewater effluent that have been found to concentrate in sludge damage the reproductive systems of fish and other aquatic animals. Increased setbacks should be established for sewage sludge applications next to schools, churches, residences, private wells, adjoining properties, and surface waters.

-

Sludge needs to be tested for more toxic substances. There are potentially thousands of chemicals that concentrate in sewage sludge. Only a handful of toxic metals, nutrients and pathogens are tested for and partially removed by wastewater treatment plants. We're asking the NC Division of Water Quality to require testing for other contaminants not being tested for in sludge such as pharmaceuticals, hormones, pathogens, fire retardants, and radioactive contaminants – to name a few. Also, to place limits on the amounts of phosphorus in runoff from sludge that can choke the life out of a river or stream.

-

BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

www.BREDL.org PO BOX 44 Saxapahaw, North Carolina 27340 sdayton@swcp.com (336)
525-2003 office