

## Local News

## Critics call for alternatives to spreading of sewage sludge

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Critics made the case for looking harder at the spreading of sewage sludge and its alternatives at a Dec. 2 public meeting in Colborne.

Much of the sludge-spreading today comes as a result of an international agreement made with the United States in 1996 governing water quality in the Great Lakes, said Maureen Reilly, director of Sludge Watch. Since then, secondary processes used by large municipalities send cleaner water to the lakes and twice as much sludge elsewhere. Some sludge is incinerated, some landfilled and the rest spread on farmland.

Downloading of provincial responsibilities to municipalities by the Harris Tories in the late 1990s left the disposal of sludge as a self-regulatory business, Ms. Reilly said. Even so, major waste-spreader Terratec has incurred 43 guideline infractions.

Provincial biosolid guidelines state sludge can't be spread until it is proven it would do no damage, but Ms. Reilly claims the science was never done.

Representatives from Terratec and the provincial government declined the invitation to attend the Dec. 2 meeting.

Ontario's current Liberal government is considering making the process of spreading simpler, Ms. Reilly warned. "Because the province and municipalities see sludge spreading as a low-cost solution



BOB OWEN / SUN MEDIA

Cramahe retired microbiologist Kris Rahn raises scientific issues she has with the spreading of sewage sludge on farmland.

to being rid of their sludge, the checks and balances aren't in place, she maintained.

Cramahe Township council voted Oct. 21 to hold a public meeting to discuss sludge spreading but at its Nov. 18 meeting withdrew from participation, agreeing only to allow the Cramahe residents to use the township meeting room for a discussion.

Cramahe Township resident Kris Rahn

was concerned when five million litres of liquid sludge was applied on farmland in five days near her home. The retired microbiologist acknowledged the material is being tested on a limited basis but is upset about human-adapted pathogens found in sludge. There are 17 types of bacteria, 18 viruses, six protozoal parasites, 12 parasitic worms, six pathogenic fungi and the same number of pathogenic yeasts found in sludge, she said, most are not included in testing done before sludge is hauled to farms.

Ms. Rahn would like to see sustainable alternative testing for pathogens, pre- and post-application testing of wells and wetlands, and monitoring of heavy metal content in soil.

Trent Hills resident Wendy Deavitt outlined the medical and financial costs she said her family has incurred since sludge was spread near her home in Trent Hills in 2006.

She intends to seek legal action against those involved in the spreading of sludge near her home in 2006. She said the health of her family and pets has been impinged.

Ms. Deavitt requested a meeting with Ontario Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs Minister Leona Dombrowsky, was refused, and a letter was sent Nov. 27 which stated, "The government is confident that using biosolids in agriculture, if current regulations are followed, do not endanger public health and safety."

Mike Clark, president of the Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary created by Muriel Braham-Wells, spoke of his concern for health effects on animals in the marsh after the surrounding farmland was coated with sludge.

Organic farmer Bob Garthson pointed to studies showing absorption of more than 20 chemicals by earthworms.

Prince Edward County does not spread

its sludge. The county is storing the de-watered material and searching for alternative disposal methods, including fuel digesters.

Durham Region is now operating a digester which serves York as well, producing heat energy. Valleyfield, Que., is experimenting with a \$6-million plasma arc process.

It was the opinion of Prince Edward County Councillor Sandy Latchford that government can no longer end its arguments with the statement, "There is nothing else we can do."

Following the meeting, Cramahe Township Councillor Pat Westrope said, "It has opened up my eyes to the negative aspects of sludge spreading."

Ms. Westrope added she is looking forward to taking this new information to a seminar in Barrie Dec. 10 sponsored by the Biosolids Utilization Committee and the Water Environment Association of Ontario. Several of the seminar speakers will be from the Ministry of Environment.

Cramahe Councillor Ed Van Egmond was somewhat more reticent about the impact of the meeting. He believed the experts didn't have answers. His understanding of the sources of the higher cadmium levels in this area conflict with the generalizations made by presenters.

Mr. Van Egmond also wonders about contentions made about using the sludge for biomass: If it is inconsistent in composition when it is spread on the fields, how is it suddenly consistent when it is used for biomass fuel?

Currently, some farmers use biosolids on fields where grain is grown. The sludge-fertilized grain is not separated from other grain when it is taken to the mill and used for flour for bread products.

"I will go to the Barrie meeting with my eyes wide open and my mind not made up," Mr. Van Egmond said.