

# 'Disaster waiting to happen'

Sludge opponents reject assurances by officials that biosolids' use on farmland is safe

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**SOILED LAND**

FARMERS VS. RESIDENTS

SECOND IN A FOUR-PART SERIES

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Biosolids are rife with contaminants potentially harmful to humans, livestock, wildlife, crops, soil and groundwater. Poorly tested or regulated, biosolids may contain thousands of toxic chemicals the effects of which we know little about. Guidelines for spreading biosolids on farmland are outdated and inadequate.

So say biosolid opponents.

The Ontario government's position is that biosolids, or sludge, is safe if used as directed and beneficial to agriculture as a fertilizer. Guidelines for its use are both up to date and adequate.

"When the conditions that we've set out ... are followed, yes it's safe," says Eileen Smith, a spokesperson for the ministry of the environment. Sludge is the solid waste left over at the end of the sewage treatment process, when clean water is removed from the foul soup of human, commercial, hospital and industrial waste that comes down the pipe.

Each year close to half of Ontario's nutrient-rich sludge — 120,000 dry

SLUDGE continued on A8

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