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FRED THORNHILL FOR THE TORONTO STAR

"I am scared to death," says Wendy Deavitt, of Warkworth, Ont., who is being treated by a Toronto toxicologist.

THEY STARTED TO BECOME ILL WHEN A FARI

CAROLA VYHNAK
URBAN AFFAIRS REPORTER

There's a note of quiet desperation in Wendy Deavitt's voice.

"I'm sitting here being continually poisoned. I am scared to death."

It started in the summer of 2006 when a farmer near her home in Trent Hills, 90 minutes northeast of Toronto, spread sewage sludge on his fields. She and her family immediately developed diarrhea, headaches, coughs and hoarseness. Since then she has been plagued with fatigue, nausea, cramps, malfunctioning kidneys and bowels and elevated levels of

lead, barium and potassium.

"I've never been this unhealthy in my life. My bowels are shutting down at 47 years old."

Deavitt and her husband, William, are one of four couples in the area who are being treated by a Toronto toxicologist for everything from chronic diarrhea to pneumonia.

Dianne and Wayne Cooke have spent \$6,000 on weekly infusions of vitamins and minerals to help rid their bodies of toxins. Their immune systems have been compromised since the wind first brought contaminants to their hilltop home in the fall of 2005.

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Site studies show 'no harm'

SLUDGE from A1

tonnes — is used by farmers and spread on 15,000 hectares of land. Most of it is given away free. (Biosolids are usually applied in liquid form but are measured in dry weight for consistency.)

But some rural residents who live near sludged properties complain they've been stricken with a range of maladies including respiratory problems, diarrhea, headaches, nausea, rashes, fatigue and pneumonia.

Municipalities have for years struggled with what to do with sludge and so it was incinerated, sent to landfills or simply dumped into the nearest Great Lake. Some has been land-applied since the 1970s.

Then in 1996 the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement stiffened sewage treatment guidelines. This created more sludge and Ontario started recommending it for use as fertilizer for farm crops. Municipalities — faced with fast-filling landfills and a U.S. border that is slowly closing to Ontario's waste — have readily accepted

personal care products and pharmaceuticals.

There's a variety of reasons why no testing is required, including: None is readily available or even exists, or the province does not consider the substance a risk.

"I don't know how the (environment ministry) can believe regulated heavy metals are the only contaminants in sludge we need to worry about," says McBride, referring to tests the environment ministry actually requires.

"Sludge is a moving target."

The environment ministry and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture,

Food and Rural Affairs actively promote using biosolids as a safe and free alternative to commercial fertilizer. Land application is regulated under the Environmental Protection Act and Nutrient Management Act.

Smith points to a 2001 report by the Water Environment Association of Ontario, a group comprised of water industry professionals and government representatives, that concludes using sludge presents little or no threat to health, the environment or water quality from composites such as regulated metals, dioxins, furans and certain organic compounds. (Though the report also notes there

isn't "sufficient credible scientific information" about pathogens, unregulated metals, pharmaceuticals and estrogenic hormones.)

The environment ministry approves applications considering factors such as site location, soil quality, slope of the land and separation distances from homes, wells and watercourses. It issues about 500 approvals each year.

Regulations and guidelines range from the treatment process to spreading rates and the waiting periods between application and grazing or harvesting.

It's how sludge keeps changing that should trigger red flags, according to McBride, the new director of Cornell Waste Management Institute in Ithaca, N.Y., where scientists have long questioned land application. He believes emerging contaminants have rendered Ontario's guidelines out of date.

Complicating the issue is that treatment plants were designed to clean the water itself, not the solids left behind. When the process is finished at

there yet, she says.

Sonya Kleywegt, a scientist with standards development branch the environment ministry, acknowledges that "information gaps" exist.

For example, biosolids aren't tested for pharmaceuticals or personal care products (known together PPCPs) because there are few k

6 *The science around these compounds is very rudimentary*

SONYA KLEYWEGT
ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY
SCIENTIST

that can do that kind of analysis accepted methodology, and benchmarks to say what is safe. "The science around these co

