

RFD

MEDIA RELEASE

PULP MILL SLUDGE BACKGROUNDER

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The BC Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks has issued Draft Three of a Sludge Regulation, which calls for some minimal testing of sludge before it is spread on farms, forests and parks. A further Ministry guideline on sludge handling and spreading warns that the sludge can contaminate groundwater.

The pulp mills call it "bio solids". The government calls it pulp mill sludge. We call it Industrial Waste.

There has been no independent testing of this material to determine what's really in it. We do not know if this industrial waste causes genetic mutations or harms the hormone system of wildlife or people exposed to it. We do not know what gasses off the sludge to harm the workers who have to handle it.

What Is It?

Pulp mill sludge is a complex and changeable mixture of dozens or even hundreds of compounds, just like mill wastewater. Some are well known, like heavy metals, dioxin and other organochlorines. Some, created by the bacteria in the treatment ponds, are probably unknown to science.

Environment Canada scientists in the Maritimes believe nonylphenol compounds are responsible for the decline in Atlantic salmon returns. We know that the pulp and paper industry uses one third of the nonylphenols in Canada, and we suspect these hormone disruptors wind up in sludge.

History of the Issue in BC

In 1994 a Kamloops farmer decided to experiment by feeding pulp mill sludge to cattle, until the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada (PPWC) alerted the public. In 1996 a quiet rural neighbourhood near Krestova was upset when Celgar mill spread 80 tonnes of kraft sludge within 170 feet of a local well. The land was subsequently sold. In 1998 a neighbourhood near Quesnel BC was shocked to find Quesnel River sludge dumped on frozen land that sloped toward creeks and a local lake. The mill subsequently removed the sludge.

In 1996, the Ministry of Environment set up a Pulp Mill Sludge Advisory Committee that was to examine all aspects of pulp mill solid waste. Environmental groups like *Reach for Unbleached!* participated fully, repeatedly demanding that the waste material undergo testing before it was broadcast over the environment.

By 1998, when the Ministry of Environment agreed to do some independent testing, to see what really was in the sludge, the Council of Forest Industries (COFI) promptly withdrew from the committee, and the budget for testing was lost.

The Ministry produced the Draft Three Sludge Regulations and Guidelines in October 1999.

There has been some limited spreading of pulp and paper sludge in British Columbia under special approvals. Paper mill sludge is mixed with GVRD municipal sludge and spread on Scott Paper poplar plantations on islands in the Fraser River. Quesnel River Pulp spreads some of its sludge on farmland in the Quesnel area. Celgar kraft sludge has been spread on some orchards and agricultural land.

This regulation throws the doors wide open for over 50,000 truckloads of sludge per year to be spread in BC communities, with virtually no government oversight and no independent monitoring.

Widespread Concern

The Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada has called for sludge to be treated as regulated "toxic waste" until "the pulp and paper industry can supply verifiable and irrefutable proof (through valid scientific testing) that there are no ill side effects to the workers who handle these products..."

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is considering listing paper mill sludge as hazardous waste.

Ontarians have been complaining about the spreading of pulp and paper sludge for years. In 1999 the Ontario Environmental Commissioner wrote: "The applicants cite concerns about the contamination of soil, groundwater and surface water, as well as impacts on livestock, wildlife and soil microorganisms. Many have also complained about odour, and symptoms such as headaches, burning eyes and breathing difficulties associated with freshly spread sludges."

The State of New Hampshire abruptly cancelled a mill sludge spreading program in 1998 after the discovery of unexpected toxic chemicals leaching into groundwater. Additionally the state is now facing a lawsuit over the spreading of mill sludge that should have been classified as hazardous waste.

In Ontario a multimillion dollar lawsuit has just been settled over the death of 43 acres of grapes where paper sludge had been piled in between the rows at Hernder Winery in St. Catherines.

What We Want

- Rigorous and independent testing of pulp mill sludge
- Prohibit the land spreading of pulp mill sludge until these waste materials are known to be safe in the environment
- Eliminate known toxic contaminants, such as nonylphenols and chlorine compounds, from pulp mill processes