

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**For Immediate Release: February 16, 2000**

## **Keep Toxic Sludge Out of Our Environment!**

Widespread concern expressed over pulp mill waste

A province-wide coalition of workers and environmental groups, including the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada, pulp mill watchdog *Reach For Unbleached!*, the Georgia Strait Alliance, the East Kootenay Environmental Society, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, the Sierra Club of BC and Greenpeace, called today for the BC Minister of Environment to close the door on land spreading of pulp mill sludge until testing proves the sludge is safe for communities, workers and the environment.

The groups are responding to the Ministry's release of Draft Three of the Pulp Mill Sludge Regulation and the Guideline for the Land Application of Pulp and Paper Mill Sludge.

"The plan to spread pulp mill sludge on British Columbian farms, forests and parkland is reckless adventurism," said Delores Broten of *Reach for Unbleached!*. "No independent testing has been done. This is how toxic accidents happen to harm children years into the future."

"No one knows all the contaminants in this sludge, or whether it is safe for people, wildlife or crops," said Peter Ronald of the Georgia Strait Alliance. "We do know that the pulp industry generates many highly toxic substances that concentrate in mill wastes and should not be spread in the environment."

"Many of the toxins in pulp production are known to cause mortality in salmon," said Mae Burrows of the T. Buck Suzuki Foundation. "We must not spread toxic sludge over forests and near salmon streams if we want our salmon stocks to rebuild."

The 36 groups are calling on the Minister to prohibit any further spreading of pulp mill sludge until independent testing has conclusively proved that there is no risk to plants, wildlife or people.

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For further information, contact:

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February 16, 2000

Hon. Joan Sawicki  
Minister of the Environment  
Legislative Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Sawicki:

Draft Three of the Pulp Mill Sludge Regulation and the Guideline for the Land Application of Pulp and Paper Mill Sludge will open the floodgates of land spreading of pulp mill sludge. We urge you to prohibit any further spreading of pulp mill sludge until testing has conclusively proven that it is safe for people in communities, workers and the environment.

Why?

Pulp mill wastewater contains a mix of hundreds of chemicals that harm the environment. In British Columbia we know this only too well, and it took years to get laws that made the mills install secondary treatment to clean up the effluent. Secondary treatment removes those bad chemicals from the water and puts them into the sludge. Now the Ministry wants to approve spreading toxic sludge on the farms, forests and parks of British Columbia.

No one knows all of the contaminants in pulp mill sludge. We do know that it contains a variety of heavy metals, benzenes and phenolics. We also know that other jurisdictions in North America that have experimented with spreading sludge have experienced unexpected problems, and frequently halt the sludge spreading programmes in a wave of citizen protest.

In 1998, when your Ministry finally agreed to commit \$20,000 to independent testing of the sludge to find out what is in it and whether it could harm people or the environment, the Council of Forest Industries withdrew from the advisory table. Behind closed doors, your staff continued to draw up regulations to allow the sludge to be spread across the province. The only testing ordered in the Regulation is for chemicals listed in the Contaminated Sites Act. This is inadequate. The few tests available show a wide range of poorly understood chemicals, including a large amount of material that cannot be identified.

If the regulation is passed, BC citizens will have no recourse, no avenue to appeal when truck after truck of sludge is dumped in their communities. Workers will be forced into contact with the sludge that often contains harmful bacteria.

Minister, we urge you to be guided by the Precautionary Principle in this matter and order thorough testing and consideration by independent scientists before you "open the flood gates" to over 50,000 truckloads per year of this unknown material spread all over British Columbia.

British Columbia has suffered enough toxic pollution from kraft pulp mills. Let's stop this contamination before it starts!

Respectfully,

Alberni Environmental Coalition, Port Alberni  
Biosphere Monitor, Quadra Island  
Canadian EarthCare Foundation, Kelowna  
Cariboo-Chilcotin Conservation Society, Williams Lake  
Comox Valley Naturalists Society, Courtenay  
Council of Canadians, Victoria Chapter  
Cortes Ecoforestry Society, Cortes Island  
East Kootenay Environmental Society, Kimberley  
Elliott-Anderson-Christian-Trozso Watershed Committee, Winlaw  
FarmFolk/CityFolk Society, Vancouver  
Forest Protection Allies, Quesnel  
Fraser Headwaters Alliance, Dunster  
Friends of Clayoquot Sound, Tofino  
Friends of Cortes Island, Cortes  
Friends of the Slocan Valley, Victoria  
Georgia Strait Alliance, Nanaimo  
Granby Wilderness Society, Grand Forks  
Greenpeace, Vancouver  
Kaslo & District Environment Society, Kaslo  
Nelson EcoCentre, Nelson  
Ocean Voice International, Bamfield  
Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society, Summerland  
Qualicum Beach Environment Committee, Qualicum Beach  
Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada, Vancouver  
*Reach for Unbleached!* Vancouver  
Rivershed Society of British Columbia, Coquitlam  
Rogers' Environmental and Educational Foundation, Nanaimo  
Sierra Club of British Columbia, Victoria  
Sierra Club of BC - Quadra Island Group  
T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation, Vancouver  
Thompson Watershed Coalition, Kamloops  
Silva Forest Foundation, Winlaw  
Valhalla Wilderness Society, New Denver  
West Arm Watershed Alliance, Nelson  
West Coast Environmental Law Association, Vancouver  
Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Vancouver

## **PULP MILL SLUDGE BACKGROUNDER**

### **February 2000**

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