

April 29, 2004

To Whom it May Concern,

As a physician residing in Loudoun County, I have some real concerns about the sludge being spread on our local fields as fertilizer. From everything I have read so far, there has been minimal if any study done on safety to the surrounding environment and its inhabitants. While the EPA has been charged with this task, the ever-present government bureaucracy has found ways of allowing the practice to continue before the studies have been undertaken. Money, of course, appears to have a lot to do with it, but the possible long-term health consequences and potential legal ramifications could make what money is being earned currently look like chicken-feed in the long-run. While I am all in favor of recycling the world's waste in a productive manner, I feel as though former EPA researcher Dr. David Lewis' caveats about the unknown effects of mixing various types of chemical and biologic waste have a great deal of merit.

I grew up in South Florida, where my mother still resides. Like Loudoun County, the town in which I grew up was once the fastest growing in the nation. Waste management has always been an issue there, and landfills loom like mountains on the horizon, with little methane flames burning from them, expelling the byproducts of what happens when various types of garbage percolate together for a long period of time. Water management is also a major issue down there and one of the creative ways to manage wastewater in S. Florida is to "recycle" it by spraying not entirely purified water on golf courses and the like. My mom happens to be an avid golfer and about three years ago developed a bizarre respiratory illness lasting 6-8 months. She saw numerous pulmonary and infectious disease specialists, and she underwent myriad procedures including a lung biopsy. All they could come up with was that while she didn't have TB, she had something resembling it. She was treated for months with antibiotics, steroids, and eventually antidepressants as her quality of life continued to deteriorate. She couldn't play golf anymore, had a chronic cough, daily spiking fevers, exhaustion, and a poor appetite. My stepfather called me on the order of twice a month fearing she was on death's doorstep. Finally and inexplicably she gradually pulled out of it, but her doctors and I have always suspected an environmental cause, and while we'll never be able to prove the recycled water as the source, I consider it a prime suspect.

We owe it to our neighbors, our parents, siblings, friends, and ourselves to insure that this "great" idea to recycle waste is truly safe. The EPA has a responsibility first to the public, not to industry. Please let your voice be heard.

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