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SLUDGE VICTIMS SPEAK AT SENATE OVERSIGHT BRIEFING INVESTIGATING EPA MALFEASANCE ON SEWAGE SLUDGE DISPOSAL

Coalition of Food, Farm, Environmental and Labor Groups Urges Congress to Halt Dumping Of Sewage Sludge on Farmland

Washington, DC, September 11, 2008 – Congress today began an investigation into EPA malfeasance, as victims of sewage sludge dumping gave information at an oversight briefing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW). The briefing, chaired by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), heard from experts and poisoning victims who urged Congress to immediately issue a moratorium on regulations that allow dumping of hazardous sewage sludge on farmland and public parks.

“This morning’s EPW briefing is the first step in a long-overdue examination of the policies that have led us to illness and loss of farmers’ livelihood,” said Center for Food Safety Executive Director Andrew Kimbrell. “Although legal, the disposal of toxic sludge on farmland has contaminated our food supply and degraded our health. In this time of repeated government food safety failures, it’s a practice that must be stopped.”

One victim heard from in the oversight briefing, Georgia farmer Andrew McElmurray, recently won a lawsuit (McElmurray vs. USDA) in which a Federal Court found that sewage sludge had so contaminated his land with heavy metals and toxins that it was useless for growing crops and a major health hazard to farm animals. “Our dairy, which was once one of Georgia’s most productive dairy farms, was destroyed by the heavy metals, PCBs, chlordane, and other hazardous wastes that local industries dumped into Augusta’s sewer systems,” explained McElmurray.

The byproduct of sewage treatment, Sludge is a toxic mix of heavy metals, synthetic organic compounds (PCBs, PAHs, etc.), detergent metabolites, pharmaceuticals, nanoparticles, and pathogens. As many as 100,000 chemicals are used in American industry; every year thousands of additional chemical compounds are put into commercial use. All can potentially enter the wastewater stream and end up in sludge. Government regulations allow sludge to be disposed of on public land including parks and farmland, despite its toxic nature.

“Sewage sludge is anything but the benign fertilizer the EPA says it is,” added Abby Rockefeller, a long time critic of sewage sludge land disposal. “Thousands of livestock and hundreds of people have fallen ill as a result of exposure to sewage sludge fertilizer. We commend Senator Boxer for holding this briefing and taking this first step towards addressing this dangerous practice.”

In October 2003, a coalition of food, farm, environmental, and labor organizations formally petitioned Acting EPA Administrator Marianne Lamont Horinko to place an immediate moratorium on the land application of sewage sludge and ultimately to prohibit the practice. The action was taken after a Georgia court ruled that land application of sewage sludge – though in compliance with EPA’s sludge rules - caused the deaths of 300 prized dairy cows at the Boyce-family farm in Burke County, Georgia. The Administrator denied the petition.

However earlier this year, in February 2008, the 11th Circuit Court issued a ruling in the McElmurray case which characterized the EPA data used in denying this petition and supporting EPA’s sludge regulations, as “unreliable, incomplete, and in some cases, fudged.” The court ruling also stated that “Senior EPA officials took extraordinary steps to quash scientific dissent and any questioning of EPA’s bio-solids program.” The court further cited with favor the claims by former EPA scientist Dr. David Lewis that EPA had purposely used “unreliable and fraudulent data to support the continuation of the sludge application program.”

“The judicial branch ruled decisively in February 2008 that the executive branch was at best incompetent and at worst crooked when it threw out the 2003 petition,” said Coalition spokesperson Laura Orlando. “In light of the court’s strong condemnation of the EPA, we believe that its time for Congress to consider stepping in and placing an immediate moratorium on land disposal of sewage sludge.”

In the wake of this landmark decision earlier this year, the coalition members are once again asking the federal government to place an immediate moratorium on the land spreading of sewage sludge.

“Five years after the first sludge petition was delivered to the EPA, this horrible practice continues,” said Orlando. “It is a dangerous and reckless disposal of hazardous waste. The result is that, throughout the country, our food is being grown on toxic waste.”

For more information about sewage sludge, the Congressional briefing, and to read sludge victims’ stories, go to Sludge News at <http://www.sludgenews.org>.

The Center for Food Safety is national, non-profit, membership organization founded in 1997 that works to protect human health and the environment by curbing the use of harmful food production technologies and by promoting organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture. On the web at: <http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org>

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