PRESS RELEASE

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Sludge In Our Waters

An investigation of industrial contaminants in sewage sludge and the impacts on surface waters in North Carolina

"Sludge In Our Waters" is a new report from Waterkeepers Carolina that investigates how industrial chemicals in municipal wastewater sewage sludge contaminatesurface waters in North Carolina when it runs off of agricultural fields into streams.

Accompanying the report is a new mapping tool that shows locations of permitted sludge fields in North Carolina; the map also has an overlay of river basins and other features. The report is intended to inform the public and policy makers about the potential pathways to human and environmental contamination from sludge applications,with recommendations for changing our current practices.

Wastewater treatment plants take raw sewage from cities and remove pollutants and solids to produce treated water (effluent) to meet government standards. At least 50% of municipal sewage sludge is applied to agricultural lands in rural areas, often not in the same county in which it was generated.

Wastewater from homes, businesses and industry are co-mingled in the wastewater stream. The solids removed (sewage sludge) contain whatever was present in the original sewage water, including pathogens, heavy metals and chemical contaminants – anything flushed or dumped down a drain.Many of these industrial chemicals should not be in the wastewater to start with and are not required to be monitored for either in the wastewater, the finished sludge, or in drinking water sources that are downstream fromthe sludge application fields.

Land application of sewage sludge, also known as "biosolids," is being marketed to farmers as safe and free fertilizer. In reality, biosolids are a complex stew of ingredients including toxic industrial chemicals. But in addition to the promised 'free' nitrogen and phosphorous, other industrial chemicals, pharmaceuticals, cleaning products, pathogens, heavy metals and nutrients are being surface applied to agricultural lands, from which they can readily run off into streams during storms. While application is not allowed during rain, application may occur even immediately prior to forecast rain.

The report looks closely at two examples of industrial contaminants found downstream of fields in the Haw River watershed where sewage sludge is applied, plus an example in the Catawba River watershed where the banned hazardous chemical PCB ended up in sewage sludge. The case studies in this report highlight only a few of the many chemicals that are released to local watersheds through land application of treated sewage sludge. But with just these examples, we have demonstrated that this practice can lead to contaminated surface waters upstream of drinking water sources

The premise stated by EPA that sewage sludge could be treated and recycled as *"biosolids which can be used as valuable fertilizer, instead of consuming space in landfills"*fails to take into account the substantial burden of toxic contaminants concentrated in sewage sludge. There is insufficient and even non-existent monitoring of many chemicals of concern. The permits for sludge application on farmland are for "non-discharge permits." This is untrue, as demonstrated in this report, as many pollutants are eventually discharged to local water bodies. This is a core problem, made worse by weak regulations and poor oversight, monitoring and enforcement.

To read the full "Sludge In Our Waters" report online:
http://hawriver.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/WKC-Report-Sludge-In-Our-Waters10-6-15.pdf

To access the Waterkeepers Carolina Sludge Application Mapping Tool:
http://www.waterkeeperscarolina.org/sludge-in-our-waters/

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