

ecoNews — Wire —

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

December 11, 2003

For immediate release

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PEAT FIRE NEAR MASON CITY APPEARS TO BE EXTINGUISHED

MASON CITY — A peat fire just northwest of Mason City appears to have been extinguished.

The fire, believed to have been started by a meth lab and reported in late November, was on land owned by Lehigh Cement Co. Workers for the company believe they had successfully put out the fire by Wednesday night by excavating the peat that was burning, spreading it out and then rolling over it with heavy equipment. No water was needed. It is believed that as much as 15 acres may have been smoldering at one time.

Peat fires, like coal fires, have been known to smolder for years. Because of that, Lehigh does plan to monitor the area daily for hot spots, according to Cindy Garza, an environmental specialist for the DNR's field office in Mason City.

While not posing any particular environmental risk, a peat fire can produce an objectionable odor that could, at times, be smelled in portions of Mason City.

For more information, contact Cindy Garza at (641) 424-4073.

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FLOATING SLUDGE ON MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEAR CLINTON APPEARS TO BE NATURALLY OCCURRING

CLINTON — A floating dark substance reported on the Mississippi River near Clinton appears to be a non-toxic, naturally occurring organic material.

The DNR and University of Iowa Hygienic Lab have been investigating the substance since receiving a report of it on Tuesday. The dark colored sludge material had accumulated along the Clinton side of the shoreline and the mouth of Mill Creek.

While the results of water sampling are not yet available, an expert in water quality from the hygienic lab believes the sludge is the result of deposition of solids on the bottom of the channel.

“Low water levels experienced throughout the summer may have caused solids to abnormally accumulate on the bottom. The decomposition may have caused these solids to rise and wind action concentrated it along the channel bank,” said Dennis Ostwinkle, supervisor of the DNR’s field office in Washington.

Since the sludge was first observed below the Archer Daniels Midland plant, an inspection of the company’s treatment works was conducted by the DNR. No problems with that operation were found.

“We also did not see any of the sludge materials floating along the shoreline or in Mill Creek on Wednesday,” said Ostwinkle.

For more information, contact Dennis Ostwinkle at (319) 653-2135.

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STATE RENEWS EFFORT TO PROTECT RURAL AIR QUALITY NEAR LARGE ANIMAL FEEDING OPERATIONS

DES MOINES — The Environmental Protection Commission will be asked to decide whether to proceed with a recommendation by the DNR to establish health standards for hydrogen sulfide gas near large concentrated animal feeding operations.

The commission meets at 9 a.m. Monday, Dec. 15 at the Ingram Office Building, 7900 Hickman Road, in Urbandale.

The DNR is proposing the health standard for hydrogen sulfide gas in the air at rural homes and other public building that meet the legislative definition of separated locations to protect Iowans living near large concentrated animal feeding operations.

The standard would be used in evaluating monitoring data to determine if hydrogen sulfide levels near structures that meet the definition of a separated location near some of the largest concentrated animal feeding operations pose health risks to citizens.

"The Legislature asked the DNR to study rural air quality near large concentrated animal feeding operations and we are responding. We have monitored hydrogen sulfide since April of 2002, but haven't had a health standard approved to compare the data to. We need an agreed upon health standard to measure against that data," said Wayne Gieselman, head of the DNR's environmental programs.

He said the monitoring study is not looking at small or medium farms, but measuring hydrogen sulfide at homes near some of the largest animal feeding operations in Iowa.

The DNR is proposing a health standard of 15 parts per billion that could not be exceeded more than seven times a year measured at those homes, churches, schools and other public facilities that meet the definition of a separated location, as required by the legislature.

The health standard would help gauge the quality of rural air, but does not restrict farm emissions. As required by law, should the health values be exceeded, then programs and plans to reduce emissions would be enacted after December 1, 2004. Any proposed methods to reduce emissions would be devised with expert technical advisory groups.

If approved by the state environmental protection commission, Iowa would be the 28th state to adopt hydrogen sulfide standards. The Iowa proposal is neither the most stringent or most lenient and is based on recommendations by Iowa State and the University of Iowa after reviewing scientific reports.

"The bottom line is we need to be able to protect rural Iowans from breathing unhealthy levels of hydrogen sulfide gas. We have monitoring data, but need a standard, then if concerns are found, we can work with agricultural researchers to explore cost-effective measures to ensure clean air," said Gieselman.

"We don't know yet if there is a problem or not," he said.

Last year the state Environmental Protection Commission passed rules to set standards for ammonia and hydrogen sulfide, but intended the rules to affect not only air near animal feeding operations, but statewide. Lawmakers nullified that effort as too broad. The new standard applies only to air near large animal feeding operations at separated locations as required by earlier legislation.

The DNR is continuing an aggressive research project of odor around livestock facilities. **This data collection study can help decision makers, researchers and others foster recommendations on how to better control odors and determine if odor control regulations are needed.**

A fact sheet detailing the proposed health standards can be found at the DNR's website at <http://www.iowadnr.com/air/news/files/H2Sfactsheet.pdf>.

For more information, contact the DNR's Brian Button at 515-281-7832.

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COMMERCIAL MANURE APPLICATOR PROGRAM TO CHANGE

DES MOINES – Commercial manure applicators can look forward to a reduction in certification fees and other changes when they attend statewide training on Jan. 6, 2004.

“There have been several changes in the program, including a requirement for businesses to be licensed,” said Jeff Prier, an environmental specialist at the DNR Spencer field office.

Prier added that law changes in 2003 also require businesses to designate a manager.

“We will be sending a letter out to all commercial applicators this month so that we can identify the businesses and the manager,” Prier said. “That will give us a contact person at each business, so that we can get them the information they need.”

The law changes will reduce the certification fee to \$75 and allow the DNR to charge an educational fee to help pay for training costs.

Next year's education fees for commercial applicators will be \$25, but those who paid this year's \$200 certification fees by May 30, 2003 are exempt from paying the education fee next year.

Another change will allow companies to substitute in a new, certified representative when another one leaves employment during the year, but only if the company paid the original representative's certification fees.

For more information on the commercial certification program, check the Iowa Manure Management Action Group's Web site at <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/immag/maccma.html>.

For more information, contact Jeff Prier at 712-262-4177.

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PLUGGED GREASE TRAP CAUSES SPILL IN SIOUX CITY

SIOUX CITY — An estimated 5,000 gallons of untreated wastewater spilled in Sioux City early Wednesday morning when an animal fat grease trap at Curly's Foods plugged.

The overflow pipe from the grease trap, part of the plant's process wastewater treatment system, became plugged overnight. The wastewater spilled from the trap into a storm sewer that leads to a concrete channel of the Old Floyd River. The channel flows into the Missouri River.

Because of weather conditions and due to the large volume of water in the Missouri River, no adverse effect on the river is expected.

Curly's Foods employees are checking the channel for impacts and have been instructed to take water samples upstream and downstream of the spill. The DNR will continue to investigate the incident.

For more information, contact Ken Hassenius or Neil Cook at (712) 262-4177.

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EPC TO CONSIDER APPEAL FROM HUMBOLDT COUNTY

DES MOINES – Commissioners will hear an appeal from Humboldt County on a livestock construction permit at the Dec. 15 meeting of the Environmental Protection Commission.

The EPC will also be asked to approve final rules for drinking water, certification programs and concrete standards for manure storage structures. In other action the commission will be asked to approve going forward with a health effects value for hydrogen sulfide

In a departure from the regular meeting time, the EPC meeting will begin at 9 a.m., at the DNR office, 7900 Hickman Road in Urbandale. The hearing for the Humboldt County Contested Case will begin at 10 a.m. Public participation is scheduled for 1 p.m. The meeting is open to the public.

The complete agenda follows:

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Minutes
- Director's Remarks
- 2004 EPC Meeting Dates
- Solid Waste Alternatives Program - Recommendations
- Proposed Rule - Adopt new IAC Chapter 567-122 "Electronics Recycling"
- Report and Presentation - Submission of Strategy Report for Electronics Waste Management in Iowa to Legislature
- FFY 2004 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Intended Use Plan
- Humboldt Contested Case

- Final Rule - Drinking Water, Operator Certification and Laboratory Certification Programs - Chapters 40,41, 42, 43, 44, 81 and 83
- Final Rule - Concrete Standards
- Notice of Intended Action – amending Chapter 20 “Scope of Title-Definitions-Forms-Rules of Practice” and to amend Chapter 32 “Health Effects Value (HEV)”
- Denial of Petition for Rulemaking by Agribusiness, et. al
- Piper Contested Case - Tabled
- Referrals to the Attorney General
 - Albert Miller [Kalona] - air quality/solid waste/penalty
- Monthly Reports
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Month’s Meeting

More information about the agenda items can be found on the DNR website under Commissions and Boards at www.iowadnr.com.

The members of the commission are Kathryn Murphy, Chair, LeMars; Terrance Townsend, Newton; Lisa Davis-Cook, West Des Moines; Darrell Hanson, Manchester; Lori Glanzman, Mt. Pleasant; Jerry Peckum, Jefferson; Heidi Vittetoe, Washington; Francis Thicke, Fairfield; and Donna Buell, Spirit Lake. The director of the DNR is Jeff Vonk.

For more information, contact Karen Grimes, at (515) 281-5135.