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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: AUGUST 20, 2009

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2. Manure contained in spill near Lester

EPC APPROVES FUNDING FOR DNR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

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DES MOINES – The Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) approved funding on Aug. 18 for the DNR’s Land Quality Bureau to administer a statewide Household Hazardous Materials (HHM) education campaign.

The multi-pronged initiative will focus on four key HHM messages for the general public: reading the label, proper purchasing, safe use, and storage and appropriate disposal.

“The Commission recognizes the important role education plays in the protection and enhancement of our natural resources,” said Brian Tormey, head of the Land Quality Bureau. “We are very pleased with the approval and excited to begin this campaign and further promote knowledge to ensure Iowa’s public and environmental health.”

Focus groups will be conducted in Des Moines, Cedar Falls and Council Bluffs to assist in the development of the statewide multi-media campaign.

The DNR will partner with ME&V, an advertising and consulting company out of Cedar Falls that was selected through a competitive bidding process.

The contract is not to exceed \$120,000 and will be funded through the Groundwater Protection Fund. The campaign will begin in the spring of 2010 and will be designed to run for at least four years, with a different key message promoted each year.

HHMs can pose a serious threat to human health when improperly used, stored or disposed. Improper disposal can also potentially contaminate the ground water that most Iowans use as their primary source of drinking water and the surface water that aquatic life and wildlife depend on for survival.

For more information on HHMs, go to www.safesmartolutions.org.

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MANURE CONTAINED IN SPILL NEAR LESTER

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LESTER – On Wednesday, the DNR continued to monitor a large manure spill that occurred Tuesday at a dairy confinement about 2.5 miles northwest of Lester.

About one inch of rain fell in northern Lyon County Tuesday night, flushing additional manure from Rock Bottom Dairy down a ditch and a tile line. The additional flow caused a dam in the creek to overflow and extended the fish kill another 150 yards downstream.

However, Bernie Bakker, owner of the dairy, has dammed the stream in three places and pumped about 450,000 gallons of manure-laden water from the creek, emptying them into a newly constructed earthen storage basin.

“His efforts have definitely prevented a major fish kill on Mud Creek, only one-half mile away,” said Jeff Prier, a DNR environmental specialist. “He’s done everything we’ve asked him to so that the site can be cleaned up.”

As of Wednesday afternoon, Bakker had completely contained the manure. Ammonia levels in the dammed part of the stream have dropped from 225 parts per million to around 15 parts per million on Thursday morning. Ammonia levels greater than about eight parts per million can be toxic to fish and other aquatic life.

Bakker continued to pump water from the stream Thursday and was applying it to a pasture. DNR staff was on site testing the water quality and checking downstream for any impact.

The fish killed were mainly white suckers, minnows and shiners, with some bullheads and creek chubs. The DNR fisheries staff has done a fish kill count.

Bakker told DNR staff that he is planning changes in his operation so that something like this will not happen again. He's already installed double clamps on the hoses and plans to pour concrete walls as a way to contain manure on site if another spill occurs.

The manure release occurred when clamps came off a temporary pipe that was transferring manure to a containment pit.

"This is a perfect example of why every facility, large or small, should have an emergency action plan for when a spill occurs," Prier said. "A list of heavy equipment contractors and several manure haulers should be part of the plan. In this case, several sites were contacted and it was tough to locate any available equipment."

Clean up efforts nearest the dairy will continue. The DNR will consider enforcement action and seek fish restitution charges.

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