

Story from Oct. 10:  
Rural residents blame fertilizer for rash of illness  
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News  
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Ellwood Shreve

THAMESVILLE -- Some Thamesville-area residents are feeling the effects of fertilizer being spread in the area, but it's just not affecting their noses.

Ralph Erickson contacted The Chatham Daily News when his family began suffering from sore throats and eye irritation after being exposed to the dust from a processed sewage-based fertilizer derived from human waste.

The product is being spread in the area and supplied to other farmers by Vanroboys Enterprises Ltd, located at 12853 Longwoods Road.

"We've just been through hell," said Erickson, whose home is located next to the Vanroboys business, where large quantities of the fertilizer with the brand name Windsor Propell are being stored.

Large plumes of dust were sent several feet into the air and drifted away in the wind as a backhoe scooped up the fertilizer for transportation on Wednesday afternoon.

As well, large quantities of dust also drifted as the product was being applied to a field along Longwoods Road, just west of Hough Road.

The product is an approved fertilizer and Vanroboys has approval to spread it, but residents are concerned about the effect it is having on their health.

More than 30 names have been collected on a petition opposed to the product being spread, and Erickson said several residents have complained about feeling ill after inhaling the dust.

Material safety data about the product says it may cause eye and skin irritation and lung irritation if the dust is inhaled. The product can also cause illness or upset stomach if ingested.

The Daily News was unable to reach company owner Henry Vanroboys or Prism -- Eberlie (Windsor) Ltd., the manufacturer of the fertilizer. Calls were not returned before deadline.

"I'm not one to complain, but this is just getting to be too much," said Erickson.

Erickson said he spoke with Henry Vanroboys in the summer about his concerns with the product.

"He told me, 'You might as well get used to it,' " said Erickson.

Mike Neuts, who lives across from Vanroboys, said the product was being spread on a field beside his home on Oct. 4, during very windy conditions. He said the dust and smell was so bad all the doors and windows had to be closed and the air conditioner turned on.

Neuts said Vanroboys "apologized for the dust and the smell, but he didn't tell me what it was."

The morning after the fertilizer was applied, Neuts had a sore throat.

"He has no respect for his neighbours," Neuts said.

Sharon Butler -- who has been staying at her mother's Longwoods Road home for the past two weeks -- has noticed ill effects in herself, her young son and mother when the fertilizer was being spread.

"I've had a sore throat," said Butler, adding her son started to get the runs and her mother was in the bathroom bringing up her supper shortly after the fertilizer was spread nearby.

"It's just been something awful," said Butler.

"I've never smelled anything like it, it's just so disgusting."

She added when the fertilizer is spread "it's just like a fog builds in the air and you can see it moving slowly towards you."

It is just not people living along Longwoods Road who are complaining of ill effects from the fertilizer.

Pat Ouellette, who lives on Evergreen Line, a concession north of Longwoods Road, said "I've had a headache since last Thursday (Oct. 4)."

Her husband suffered a severe headache for three days and her 15-year-old daughter has been nursing a sore throat and is hoarse. She added her family can't use their outdoor hot tub because they can't stand the smell.

"We can't sit outside . . . We're too afraid to sit outside."

Erickson has been growing frustrated that his efforts to have something done through the municipal health services department and Ministry of the Environment have gone nowhere.

Color Photo: Ellwood Shreve Photo / CLOUDS of dust ARE created on a field near Thamesville on Wednesday...with the application of a process sewage-based fertilizer derived from human waste

THAMESVILLE

The Chatham Daily News

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Editorial:

This fertilizer doesn't belong

How would you feel about inhaling human waste? What about the thought of it being used to fertilize crops you might one day eat?

It sounds repulsive, but it is true. A Thamesville area farmer is spreading a processed sewage-based fertilizer derived from human waste on his fields. It's dry, so the powder scatters onto the four winds. Neighbours hate the smell and say they are feeling the ill effects, effects the approved product's literature warns of: sore throat, eye, nose and lung irritation.

When you hear of such effects, you would think anyone spreading the fertilizer would want to be in a special suit. What about the nearby residents? They have to close their windows and stay indoors, yet still suffer from exposure to the powder.

Something is rotten at the Ministry of Environment if such use of a human-waste derivative is OK.

Even without the airborne ill effects, using human waste to fertilize fields opens a whole can of worms. If the waste is taken from composting toilets, septic tanks or a sewage treatment plant, there are many contaminants of which we should be wary. Urine serves as the body's flushing mechanism. Toxins and other materials literally flow out of our bodies. Estrogen from birth control pills and a variety of chemicals and drugs from medicines or narcotics top the list. Why do you think athletes who face drug testing are asked to provide a urine sample?

The thought of hormones, chemicals and other materials being absorbed into plants that may one day wind up on the dinner table or even be fed to livestock is reason enough to rethink the use of the fertilizer.

In the Thamesville area case, the blame drifts around in much the same manner as the powdered poop. Can you blame the farmer? He's using an approved product, yet to expose his neighbours to such a material opens the door for criticism. The company that produces the fertilizer is doing so under government approval, yet is well aware of the ill effects. So too is the government.