

Fertilizer sent to landfills: Tainted product could cost MMSD \$1.8 million

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Sep 18, 2007 (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - McClatchy-Tribune Information Services via COMTEX) -- WMI | charts | news | PowerRating -- The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District is beginning slowly to dispose of more than 10,000 tons of contaminated sewage sludge fertilizer -- one truckload at a time -- at landfills in Franklin and in Michigan.

On Monday, a pair of trucks from Sheboygan-based Edler Bros. Trucking Inc. began carrying loads of up to 23 tons each of the fertilizer from the Jones Island sewage treatment plant to Waste Management Inc.'s Metro landfill at 10712 S. 124th St. in Franklin.

Tainted fertilizer is being mixed with loads of garbage and buried at the landfill, a Waste Management spokesman said.

About 200 tons a day will be removed from storage silos to Franklin, said Greg Misun, an operations supervisor at Jones Island for United Water. The company operates MMSD facilities under a private contract.

Dried sludge fertilizer made at the Jones Island sewage treatment plant since mid-June has been contaminated with varying amounts of toxic chemicals known as PCBs. The chemicals likely came from the cleaning of two sewers in mid-June.

The fertilizer has been held in storage inside silos while MMSD and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency worked out a disposal agreement.

MMSD is facing costs of \$1.8 million or more to deal with its summertime sludge problem, officials said Monday.

About 6,400 tons of fertilizer produced to date with less than 50 parts per million of PCBs gradually can be trucked off to a local landfill, under the agreement with EPA, MMSD contract compliance officer John Jankowski said. Disposal cost is estimated at \$33 a ton, for a price tag of \$211,200.

There is no estimate of the final volume of the fertilizer to be trucked to Franklin because contaminated sewage sludge continues to be produced at the Jones Island plant at a rate of 100 to 120 tons a day.

Dried sludge with the heaviest concentration of the chemicals, above 50 parts per million, must be disposed of at specially licensed toxic waste

landfill near Detroit, the EPA has said.

An estimated 3,600 tons -- more than double earlier estimates -- of this heavily tainted fertilizer will be shipped to the Wayne Disposal Inc. landfill in Belleville, Mich. The landfill has agreed to accept only five truckloads -- about 100 tons or so -- a day, Misun said.

Those trucks are being filled overnight and driven to Michigan to avoid morning rush hour commuter congestion through Chicago.

Disposal cost in Michigan is estimated at \$210 a ton, or \$756,000 for the load.

MMSD will not use its dried sewage sludge for any fertilizer products, especially Milorganite, until contamination levels consistently fall below 1 part per million of PCBs, district spokesman Bill Graffin said.

Though federal regulations would allow MMSD to spread sewage sludge on soil if it contains less than 10 parts per million of PCBs, the district has set a voluntary limit of 1 part per million for Milorganite. This limit was adopted to enable the district to sell its nationally distributed Milorganite brand in states with standards more stringent than EPA's.

PCBs in the two sewers probably came from historic discharges and not recent midnight dumping, MMSD officials have said. The chemicals have not been manufactured in the United States since 1977.

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