

News Releases

DHEC News Release: DHEC Issues Emergency Regulation, Expands Investigation into PCBs Found at Water Treatment Plants

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 25, 2013

DHEC Issues Emergency Regulation, Expands Investigation into PCBs Found at Water Treatment Plants

COLUMBIA - The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) today issued an emergency regulation regarding the illegal dumping of hazardous materials into sewer systems. An investigation into the origin of the materials by state and federal authorities, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is ongoing. There is currently no known impact to public health associated with this matter. Water is safe to drink, and there is no known discharge to waterways.

Last month, DHEC announced <http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/news/2013/nr20130822-02.htm> that substances containing **polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)**

<http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/news/docs/pcbbackground9.25.13final.pdf> had been illegally introduced into the wastewater collection systems of several upstate publicly-owned treatment works (POTWs). The substance has now been detected in Richland County. DHEC has determined that an emergency regulation of activity related to waste water processing is needed until the full scope of this criminal activity can be assessed.

DHEC is issuing this **emergency regulation** <http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/news/docs/pcbemergencyregfinal.pdf> to protect the environment during the investigation by state and federal authorities. The emergency regulation will apply for 90 days, and upon expiration, may be extended an additional 90 days.

The PCB contaminated waste from unknown sources has been illicitly discharged into sewer systems, and the primary concentration of PCBs has been identified in wastewater treatment sludge from several public wastewater treatment systems. Some South Carolina wastewater treatment systems are permitted for the land application of their sludge. DHEC's current regulations for land application, R.61-9.503 and 504, mirror the current federal sewage sludge regulations related to pollutant loading adopted in 40 CFR 503. The federal Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)

regulates PCB levels in sludge at levels equal to or greater than 50 parts per million (ppm). PCBs are not expected to be found in wastewater treatment systems, because they were banned in the United States over thirty years

ago. Therefore, there are currently no federal or state regulations to limit the land application of sludge below 50 ppm. Based on the suspected criminal activity, DHEC has determined the need for specific regulations limiting the land application of sludge containing detectable levels of PCBs.

With the issuance of this emergency regulation, DHEC is seeking to prevent illegally dumped PCBs from being re-introduced into the environment. The regulation applies to the land application of sludge from wastewater treatment systems, including but not limited to municipal wastewater treatment facilities, industrial wastewater treatment facilities, septage from septic tank management, and grease trap waste from interceptor tanks serving facilities such as restaurants.

DHEC is also requiring increased testing of sludge, regardless of disposal method, to aid in identifying illegal dumping suspects. DHEC has informed all of the state's class III landfill operators and waste water treatment plants of the matter, and provided them guidance regarding proper disposal and reporting any suspicious activity.

DHEC is issuing a Be On the Lookout (BOLO) through the State Law Enforcement Division to heighten awareness among law enforcement of illegal dumping and solicit the help of local law enforcement agencies.

The community is asked to report any suspicious activities near a manhole, septage receiving facility, or other location that has the potential for delivering wastewater to a treatment facility. To report illegal discharges into a manhole, restaurant grease receptacle, etc.: Please contact Crime Stoppers at 1-864-23-CRIME, which is 1-864-232-7463, or 911 immediately. To report any other tips or information that may be helpful in identifying the source(s) of these PCBs, please contact DHEC's toll-free 24-hour emergency response line at 1-888-481-0125.

POTWs treat wastewater to remove contaminants, producing effluent water and a solid waste byproduct. Affected POTWs have determined that the PCBs are being captured in the solid waste byproducts. The byproducts containing the PCBs are being segregated into on-site holding basins or tanks for cleanup. **The POTWs have tested, and will continue to test, effluent discharges to ensure the illegal dumping does not present an environmental concern.** DHEC is working with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the POTWs, while the utilities develop plans to address the PCBs.

PCBs are chemicals that were used as coolants and lubricants in transformers, capacitors, and other electrical equipment before being banned by Congress in 1979 because of evidence that they build up in the environment and can cause adverse health effects.

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