

DCEC Newsletter

Environmental News for Door County



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SPRING 2007

Breaking News

AFTER MORE THAN FOUR YEARS of public comments and hearings around the state, the State Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees allowed the rules governing manure management on 150 of the states largest farms to go into effect on March 8th.

Following a *Natural Resources Board* hearing in January where the *Dairy Business Association* presented them with a letter requesting further weakening of NR 243, it was feared that the hearing process would have to start all over again. Fortunately, thanks to all of the calls, cards and letters, and combined efforts of

Please see "News"—page two

In This Issue:

Page 2

WI Runoff Rules.

Page 3

Mercury in Light Bulbs.
PDRs for Wisconsin? Yes!

Page 4

Renewable Energy Task Force.
Michigan's Billboard Controls.

Page 5

Conserve that Water!

Page 7

Important Contacts.
Become a Member.

Page 8

Mark Your Calendars.
The DCEC Endowment Fund.

Nitrates Are in Your Waters Nitrates: the Neglected Pollutant

RECENTLY MANY PEOPLE HAVE BECOME CONCERNED over the levels of nitrate in surface water supplies. Concern has been expressed that modern farming practices are contributing to the pollution of our state and nation's drinking water. Some have gone so far as to suggest radical changes in farming techniques in hopes of solving the problem. An understanding of the relationship between agriculture and nitrate is necessary before reasonable decisions can be made.



Nearly all surface waters show a low level of nitrate throughout the year and this has not yet been deemed a public health hazard. When nitrate nitrogen concentrations rise above 10 milligrams per liter, however, water suppliers are required to issue an alert, and steps are normally taken to minimize the exposure of at-risk individuals to these higher concentrations.

Elevated nitrate levels often occur in May and/or June when most agricultural fertilizers are applied. Concentrations normally peak and decline within a few days. The realistic problem facing the public with regard to surface water is how to minimize the frequency and severity of those peak concentrations that exceed 10 milligrams per liter.

Please see "Nitrates"—page six

Our Planet on a Computer Near You

IF YOU'D LIKE TO SPEND SEVERAL FASCINATING HOURS seeing our entire planet from space, just turn on your computer. A free download program *Google Earth* can be downloaded in about 45 minutes (dial-up) to your computer and you will be able to zoom in on any area on the planet. It may take a while to educate yourself to use the controls for each function, but the effort is *well worth the time*.

There are designated major listed attractions that you might wish to visit from space and you are also able to move freely about the planet finding and exploring places you have been to or wish to visit.

One of the most impressive is the travel through the Grand Canyon with the illusion that you are in a low-flying plane skimming the canyon walls. You can also zoom in on Door County from space to follow the island chain to the Garden Peninsula and upper Michigan.

The educational possibilities are fascinating and endless for your entire family. Use your search engine or browser to find *Google Earth*, download it free and enjoy it, with our compliments!



DCEC Incorporated in 1971 under the laws of Wisconsin as a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation

Wisconsin Runoff Rules Impact Farmers

WISCONSIN'S RULES TO CONTROL POLLUTED RUNOFF from farms, as well as other sources, went into effect in 2002. The legislature passed the rules to protect Wisconsin lakes, streams and groundwater from contamination.

DNR rule NR 151 defines performance requirements and prohibitions for farms and urban construction site erosion. It also manages runoff from streets and roads, and fertilizer use on large grass areas.

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) rule ATCP 50 identifies conservation practices that farmers must follow and sets out the requirements for nutrient management plans.

Agricultural Standards and Prohibitions

For farmers who grow agricultural crops:

Farmer must meet tolerable soil loss on cropped fields and follow a nutrient management plan to limit entry of nutrients into state surface and groundwater

For farmers who raise, feed or house livestock:

Prevent direct runoff from feedlots or stored manure into state waters, and limit livestock access to waterways and also maintain sod cover along waterways. Following a nutrient management plan is also required.

For farmers who have, or plan to construct a manure storage facility:

Farmer must maintain structure to prevent overflow and repair or upgrade any failing or leaking structure that violates groundwater standards. New facilities must meet technical design standards.

For farmers with land in a Water Quality Management Area: (300 feet from a stream, 1,000 feet from a lake or likely groundwater contamination area).

Farmer must divert clean water away from feedlot, manure storage area and barnyards and not stack manure in a non-confined pile.

Nutrient Management Plan (NMP)

To meet this requirement, farmers may hire an agronomist or prepare their own NMP if they have been qualified by taking the DATCP approved training course. These plans must rely on soil nutrient tests and comply with the current Natural Resource Conservation Program's Nutrient Management Standard 590 and follow the recommendations of UWEX publication A2809, unless there are special circumstances. Additional management practices are needed to reduce phosphorus discharge if the farm has a Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Evaluation permit or are near high priority waters.

Cost Sharing

Many farmers voluntarily install conservation equipment and adopt practices on their farms that help improve water quality, wildlife habitat and prevent soil erosion. Cost sharing is available for many practices and farmers can negotiate volun-

tary cost share practices that:

1. Pay for selected conservation practices or selected costs
2. Pay for installation and/or maintenance
3. Pay for some practices if a farmer agrees to install others without cost sharing
4. Pay alternative flat rates for annual practices, nutrient management and contour farming
5. Make payments for a specified number of years if a farmer commits to continue those annual practices, nutrient management and contour farming

Cost sharing can contribute nearly the all of entire cost of a project so there is no real and valid argument that these requirements are "putting farmers out of business." Many farmers at or near retirement age will need to evaluate their options and carefully consider the viability of continuing their present livestock operation.

Farming is a way of life that continues to be an enviable way to raise a family with honest and dedicated work ethic passed on through generations by example. Cost sharing has been made available to protect water quality now and far into the future and farm operators can take advantage without huge financial obligations if they chose.

News — cont. from page one

special groups over the last several years, the Committee listened to their constituents and put the rules into effect.

We now have manure management rules for the "factory farms" in Wisconsin that require:

- 6 months of manure storage capacity of liquid manure by 2010.
- A ban on surface spreading of liquid manure during February and March by 2010.
- A ban on surface spreading of liquid manure when the ground is frozen/snow covered.
- All animals must be counted using the DNR's Mixed-Animal Unit Calculation.

(Under the NR243 Rules animals must be calculated using the conversion factor to determine how many equal 1000 animal units. 1000 animal units is the factor determining a Combined Animal Feeding Operation. (CAFO) and can be made up of different animal types to arrive at the total amount. Examples are: 710 mature cows, or 2500 hogs, or 5500 turkeys would be equal to 1000 animal units.)

The number of CAFO's in Wisconsin has risen from none in 1985 to nearly 141 in 2006 and there are currently 59 CAFO's in Northeast Wisconsin Region. While the vast majority of Wisconsin's 30,000 livestock farms are generally small, (the average dairy herd is 70 cows) the number of very large farms is growing along with the many problems associated with the waste and odor generated by the large factory farm operation.

Mercury in Your Light Bulbs?...YES!

MERCURY HAS BEEN USED IN APPLIANCES for many decades now. Mercury switches have provided superior means of making electrical contact switches, safety sensors and measurement devices. The unique properties of mercury in its elemental form have proven to be very valuable in appliance applications.

Due to its liquid state, high density and conductivity, mercury is often used in tilt switches: turning on or off a lamp, electrical motor, or pump. The mercury makes or breaks an electrical connection inside a sealed ampoule that typically has two wires attached to it. The switch makes contact whenever the orientation of the device is changed. For example, when a washing machine lid is raised, or when a space heater tips over, the switch is triggered.

These switches are very durable and very reliable. The mercury also makes for a smooth, quick switch with little or no contact chatter.

However, mercury switches often outlast the life of the appliance they serve. Appliance manufacturers have been phasing out the use of mercury over the past few years. Major appliances manufactured after January 1, 2001 have not contained any mercury switches and mechanical switches are being used as alternatives to the mercury switches.

The one exception to this is some gas stoves where spark combustion can be a consideration. Many of the older mercury switches were used in a wide array of applications.

Automobile manufacturers have used mercury switches for hood-trunk lid illumination since 1977 and in some anti-locking brake systems manufactured prior to 2003. While automakers have phased out the use of mercury-containing switches, automobiles have a long street life. As such, many of these vehicles are still on the road.

Others may be off the road and headed to scrap yards.

Overall, an estimated 67 million switches are available for recovery. The *National Vehicle Mercury Switch Recovery Program* provides incentives for dismantlers to remove mercury-containing switches from scrap vehicles before they are shredded and used to make new steel. Once the vehicles are crushed, it's too late. The opportunity to remove mercury in the recycling stream is lost and the mercury will be vaporized and released to the atmosphere in the smelting furnace process.

In June 2006, EPA proposed a rule that would impose requirements on any future use of these types of mercury-containing switches in passenger vehicles to be replaced with ball-bearing type switches.

What happens to mercury switches in crashed vehicles that are awaiting repair or salvage? If the original impact did not rupture the ampoule it may still be intact and functional. If not the mercury would have been lost to the

location where the contact occurred and not cleaned up. It would eventually become integrated into our groundwater or atmosphere in a gaseous format.

Another major and serious contributor to the mercury contamination dilemma we face is the disposal of *long-life bulbs, fluorescent tubes and Mercury Vapor lights*.

A problem that has surfaced in the last few weeks is the improper disposal of long-lasting, compact fluorescent light bulbs. These new, small spiral-style bulbs contain *mercury* in small amounts. When their life is done, they should be disposed of as hazardous waste, much the same as the large outdoor mercury vapor lights used for municipal and rural lighting.

In most cases the small long-life fluorescent bulbs and the mercury vapor bulbs are simply thrown in the trash. This practice has to cease and proper recycling must become the end result.

Even though the amount of mercury is very small, the

Please see Mercury—page five



Statewide PDR for Wisconsin? Let's Go for It!

SINCE 2002, THE *FEDERAL FARM AND RANCH LANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM* (FRPP) has provided funds to purchase conservation easements on working farms all over the country. The program is designed to protect prime agricultural lands. Nationally, the program is most successful in places where established Purchase of Development Rights programs provide matching funds.

Here in Wisconsin, the DNR, two counties, two towns and six land trusts have worked to combine this pool of federal money with state grants and private donations to protect 10,800 acres of farmland permanently.

Last year, the Working Lands Initiative Steering Committee, a group of advisors convened by the Wisconsin

Secretary of Agriculture, concluded that current land use policies in Wisconsin should be, but are not, preventing the fragmentation of working farms.

A key component of that committee's recommendations was a statewide *Purchase of Development Rights* (PDR) program that would provide matching grants to land trusts and local governments to *buy* development rights on working farms. The goal of such a program is to keep farmland and farming financially viable in Wisconsin communities.

A state PDR program would accomplish much:

- Offer farmers an alternative to selling

Please see PDR—page six

DCEC Newsletter—SPRING—2007—Page 3



Renewable Energy On the Move!

ACTIVELY PROMOTING RENEWABLE ENERGY IN DOOR COUNTY is the job of DCEC's volunteer Renewable Energy Task Force, or RETF for short. If renewable energy interests you, call us to find out how you can be involved!

Community Wind Energy

Two years ago RETF initiated county-wide discussions on "community wind energy", with numerous public meetings throughout the area. The next step was the formation of *Community Wind Energy LLC*, (CWE) a separate legal entity established to further explore utility-scale wind energy that could offset Door County's electrical usage from coal-fired power plants.

Would your group like a presentation on wind energy? See below for contact information. CWE speaks to groups large (schools, annual club meetings, etc.) and small (corporate boards, executive committees, administrative teams, etc.)

Renewable Energy Resource Directory

Another accomplishment of RETF is the *Door County Renewable Energy Resource Directory*. Published last fall, it will be updated periodically. The Directory lists the people and places where renewable energy already is being used in Door County! It also lists the suppliers and contractors who helped these folks establish their renewable energy systems. You can access the Resource Directory at the DCEC website: www.dcec-wi.org On the side bar, click on "About Us", and then on "RETF" on the top bar.

Learn About Renewable Energy

For the second year, a Renewable Energy class is being offered by the Clearing, led by Don Pardonner and Judy Reninger who live in a solar heated home in northern Door County. Other classes in renewable energy will be offered by LIR (Learning in Retirement) this coming summer.

Solar Home Tour in Door County

Later in the year, look for news about the annual *National Solar Home Tour*, scheduled for September 2007. This is a chance to see the possibilities for residential renewable energy right here in Door County, as householders open their homes to show off their systems.

Planning Ahead

RETF is in the process of developing a three-year plan and seeking grant funding to expand its educational activities for the promotion of renewable energy.



All of Our Statue of Liberty's Power Is 100% Renewable Energy!

For more information on RETF

To attend the next meeting: Contact Don Pardonner at PO Box 260, Sister Bay WI 54234; 920-839-1182; email donpardonner@dcwis.com

For More Information on CWE

Contact Bill Utley at 920-333-0523 or email bill@communitywindenergy.us

Michigan Beats WI in Billboard Control

IN A HISTORIC MOVE, THE STATE OF MICHIGAN passed a new law, effective last January, that "caps" the number of billboards allowed in their state. This law will prevent the addition of any new billboards that are visible from state and federal highways throughout the state of Michigan. This law establishes a tremendous precedent for other states to follow, especially Wisconsin.

To pass such a law in Wisconsin will require the support of both Democrats and Republicans, in both the State Assembly and State Senate. **State Senator Fred Risser**, Democrat of Madison, has written bills like this in the past and he can be expected to introduce a bill in the State Senate again during this session. A sponsor or sponsors are still needed to bring Senator Risser's proposed bill before the State Assembly.

But, there is opposition.

In the past, Wisconsin's state-wide billboard lobby has been quite effective in stopping any effort to limit the proliferation of billboards. They've also managed to ease restrictions on

existing billboards.

Wisconsin, with its wide and varied range of natural scenic and ecological attractions should follow Michigan's lead in preventing further landscape blight from unneeded advertising.

Here in Door County, we treasure our scenic resources. Because of its natural beauty, our county is a tourist destination. With tourism as a major economic factor supporting our local economy year-round, we need to become a forceful and positive proponent of billboard control to preserve our biggest tourist attraction: our natural beauty.

A cap on billboards will help Wisconsin stand again with progressive, environmental leaders like Michigan.

Can you help? Yes. *We'll let you know when Senator Risser's bill is under deliberation. Then, we will urge you to contact your elected legislators [Sen Lasee and Rep Bies if you vote in Door County] and express your support for the cap proposal. Urge them to put a cap on Wisconsin billboards.*



Billboard Free Roads are a Pleasure to Drive

What You Can Do for Our Earth

In the effort to reduce our environmental footprint on this planet, conserving water certainly plays a part. Sometimes we are unaware of the water we are wasting. Here are a few tips on ways to conserve water around the house from *Every Drop Counts*, a Lake Michigan water conservation organization.

The most common source of water leaks in the home is the toilet. The seal of the rubber flapper may not be tight and the tank water slowly leaks into the bowl. To check for a leak, place a few drops of food coloring into the tank. Check the bowl after 15 minutes. If the dye is visible in the bowl it means you have a leak. *Proud to say, I fixed my toilet myself!*

Check all of your faucets for drips. Count the number of drips from the leaky fixture for 60 seconds. If, for instance, you have 30 drips per minute, that calculates to 4.3 gallons of water wasted per day. That calculates to 129 gallons a month and 1,577 gallons wasted in a year! Often the faucet drip can be fixed with a simple washer replacement.

Make sure you turn off the water while brush-

ing your teeth or shaving. Turn the water on only when actually needed for rinsing. *When I see that on a TV show, I yell, "Turn off the water!" at my TV screen.*



Running your water during a shave wastes more water than one person needs for drinking water for a full week!

Scrape, rather than rinse, dishes before loading into the dishwasher and, of course, only run a full load.

Install aerators on your faucets to reduce water use by as much as 4%.

Plant native grasses, shrubs and trees in your yard. They do not need to be watered as frequently as non-native species and can usually survive a dry period without watering.

Don't hose down your sidewalk or driveway *like my dad used to do*. Sweep up the leaves and debris instead.

Use a commercial car wash that recycles water. If you choose to wash your car at home, do it on the grass area to prevent runoff.

Old habits die hard and I've had to change my ways

through the years, and you can, too. Become your own "water police" and reduce your use.

See these and more ideas at www.everydrop.org

Eileen Andera ~ DCEC President

Mercury—from page three

cumulative result of improper disposal is dangerous, on an equal plane with the discharge from coal-fired power plants. Some large chain stores that sell these bulbs are being urged to conduct recycling efforts to ensure their proper disposal.

Mercury is classified as both hazardous and toxic by most of the states and the Federal EPA. Fluorescent lamps often contain over *three times* the concentration of mercury allowable for landfill disposal in most states. Disposal of spent tubes and lamps at a designated hazardous waste landfill can be costly and lead to increased liability in the long run.

Under the *Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act*, the Federal EPA, state agencies and courts can hold **any individual or corporation liable for cleanup of a hazardous waste site regardless of the extent of their contribution**. The risk of being a *potentially responsible party* is causing many waste-genera-

tors, including small businesses, to look for alternatives to landfill disposal.

Fluorescent lamps contain small quantities of mercury, cadmium and antimony. It has been estimated that between 450 and 500 million fluorescent lamps are disposed of in the United States each year, dumping over 30,000 metric tons of mercury contaminated waste into the nation's landfills.

Because of improper disposal methods, mercury can travel through the soil to various water sources. Lakes are polluted with mercury, rendering fish unsafe to eat. Concentration of mercury in fish at one Minnesota lake has increased 5 percent a year since 1970 according to a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency study. Wisconsin lakes would be very similar. As mercury moves up the food chain, it becomes more concentrated, and in even small miniscule amounts, it is extremely poisonous to the human nervous system.

Please see Mercury—page six

Nitrates—from page one

The connection between agricultural activity and stream nitrate loadings cannot be denied. Elevated levels of nitrate have been noted in streams draining watersheds with high levels of corn or soybean production, and high nitrogen fertilizer application.

Runoff from uncontained livestock operations is also a contributing factor. In the case of livestock operations, improved waste handling to minimize runoff can help significantly, but the situation regarding cropland is much more complex.

Studies have shown that most of the nitrate lost from crop fields moves through subsurface flow rather than in surface water runoff. This indicates that direct loss of applied nitrogen fertilizer in surface runoff is not the major contributor to high nitrate levels in groundwater.

Nitrate in water is derived from three primary sources: rainfall, decomposition of soil organic matter, and nitrogen amendments (fertilizers, manures, etc.). Ideally, most of the nitrate in soil is absorbed by the harvested crop. Problems occur when the crop does not remove sufficient nitrate, and the excess is flushed into streams after harvest, or when no growing roots are present to intercept it as it moves toward the stream.

The solution to the excess nitrate problem involves developing cropping systems that remove the nitrate added to, or produced within a given field in a given year. Some farmers choose a yield goal and then add adequate fertilizer nitrogen to supplement the amount normally released from the organic matter, to achieve the desired yield goal. The relatively dry summers which Wisconsin has experienced in recent years have reduced removal by crops, contributing significantly to the nitrate problems seen in the past several springs in many areas.

It is unlikely that nitrate peaks can be eliminated completely, because farmers must make their fertilizer decisions with no knowledge of what type of growing season will develop. There are, however, management strategies which may assist the farmer in reducing this problem.

Fertilizing for a realistic yield goal is one method. Yield is determined by the total crop production management system, not nitrogen alone. If the remainder of the production system limits production capacity to 130 bushels per acre, adding additional nitrogen to produce 170 bu. is not only detrimental to the environment, but is also expensive.

Management programs should be improved, where necessary, to better utilize the fertilizer applied, or fertilizer rates should be reduced to coincide with anticipated yields.

In addition, farmers can adopt side dressing programs in which most of the nitrogen fertilizer is applied after the crop emerges. It is easier to determine potential yield once planting date and plant stand have been established. This approach can aid in developing nitrogen rates for potential yields and should reduce accumulations of excess nitrate.

Fortunately, such management options may reduce the cost of production for farmers, as well as reduce the quantities of nitrate potentially available to enter streams.

If you suspect there may be nitrates in your private water source beyond the limit 10 ppm (milligrams per liter) at any time during the year, take a water sample and bring it to one of the farm events where free testing is done. Or, contact your local reliable plumbing contractor or Analytichem Lab in Luxemburg (Dykesville).

N9190 Bay Meadow Lane 920 866 3955 (that test will be for nitrates and bacteria for \$45).

Watch for more *cause and effect* of nitrates in our surface and well water in our next newsletter issue. There is more to report!

Mercury—from page five

The only *good alternative* is to recycle mercury containing lamps and tubes. This is presently a long and expensive process. But, the alternatives are to allow still more mercury into our surface water, a contamination problem becoming more serious with each addition of a new contributing source.

You might want to ask your friends and neighbors what they do with used fluorescent and energy saving bulbs when they burn out. You might also want to ask your rural friends and city administrators how they dispose of used mercury vapor bulbs. Then, ask your Wisconsin State representatives to initiate control of this hazardous waste material.

Your family, and future generations, depend on your action to help with this problem.

PDR—from page three

land to developers by compensating farmers for protecting their land.

- Keep farmland in private ownership by selling only development rights, landowners retain the ability to farm, lease, sell and bequeath the property.
- Keep farmland affordable as it is transferred from one generation the next – the federal estate tax system includes generous benefits for land protected by conservation easements.

The program would attract more federal money than land trusts can attract by themselves and PDR grants would be eligible to match funds from USDA's Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Across the country, 27 other states and over 50 local governments operate PDR programs successfully. They are well-tested tools. It's a natural fit that Wisconsin, long a leader in the agricultural community, should implement a PDR program in this state. Supporters are working to include a PDR program in the state budget for this year.

Call your state senator and assembly representative and urge support of this great funding program for the future of open space and viable farming operations in Door County and State of Wisconsin.

Tell them to think progressive and act accordingly!

visit the DCEC's new website at:
www.dcec-wi.org
(still slightly under construction)

My Door County Water in 10 years?



Not If You Can Help It!

If you're not already a member, please consider joining DCEC today. Help preserve the quality of the peninsula we love for now and for generations to come. Thank You.

dcec membership application

- \$25 Individual \$35 Family \$50 Sustaining
 \$100 Donor \$_____ Other \$15 Student/Limited

This amount would really help! Thanks!

Name(s) _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Door County voter? () yes () no

Township or Municipality: _____

Email: _____

Summer mailing address, if different:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Please mail to: DCEC, P.O. Box 114, Fish Creek, WI 54212

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Late Breaking News on Manure Controls (NR243)!

See Page One

More Late-breaking News!

WATER SEMINARS COMING TO DOOR COUNTY THIS SPRING!

AS A RESULT OF A GRANT from the *Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership*, DCEC will be presenting two “water-quality” workshops in Door County this coming spring.

Both will be held on Wednesdays at the Collins Learning Center at *Crossroads at Big Creek*, 7:00 pm each evening.

While the precise topics and speakers for each of the events are still to be finalized, it's not too soon to mark the dates in your calendars:

May 30th — 7:00 pm

June 27 — 7:00 pm

Please join us for two great evenings filled with information and insights about Door County's most precious asset: *Water!*

And, bring along a couple of friends! You need not be a member to attend!

The DCEC Endowment Fund

THE *DCEC ENDOWMENT FUND* exists to fund the activities of the Door County Environmental Council far into the future.

Every year, the fund grows is one year sooner that DCEC can devote our efforts exclusively to protecting our county's beautiful environment.

You can help this important fund to grow even faster by remembering DCEC in your estate. This has become easier with the recent federal law allowing donors to transfer IRA balances *without first paying federal income taxes* on those amounts. (Consult your financial advisor, please)

So, whether you can contribute now or later, please make a point of supporting *DCEC Endowment Fund*.

Legacies, memorials and direct gifts are all deeply appreciated. Please call, or have your advisor call, Jerry Viste at (920) 743-6003 for further information

...and, after you read this newsletter, please pass it along to a friend.