

Members of North Dakota's oil industry watchdog group, Dakota Resource Council (DRC), reacted swiftly to news that the North Dakota Department of Health voted on August 11th, to significantly increase the allowable limits of radioactivity in waste to be disposed in North Dakota.

The North Dakota Health Council, the 11-member governing body of the ND Department of Health agreed unanimously at a Tuesday morning meeting to increase limits from 5 picocuries per gram to 50 picocuries per gram of allowable radioactive material for special waste landfills approved to handle radioactive waste. The change in rules came at the request of the oil industry.

DRC members, many of whom are farmers and ranchers in Western North Dakota, objected not only to the decision to raise levels, but how the notices for the meeting were posted and how interested parties and press were notified with less than a week's notice. The meeting notice posted to the ND Secretary of State's website on August 6th, however DRC and others did not receive the official email notification from the Department of Health until late in the day August 6th, a Thursday and the meeting was scheduled for 9 am Tuesday, August 11th, allowing for only two full business days notice.

Marie Hoff of Bismarck, past chair and board member of DRC, who attended Tuesday's Health Council meetings said, "While the Health Council may not have violated reporting requirements for today's meeting, they violated the public's trust by deliberately keeping this meeting under the radar. If this was a sound and safe decision for future North Dakotans, why not give a proper 30-day notice and conduct themselves with the utmost transparency? I am very concerned that the agency charged with protecting the health and safety of the people are maneuvering with such secrecy. It makes one wonder what else is being hidden."

DRC staff member Nicole Donaghy, who has been monitoring the issue for the DRC Oil and Gas Task Force said, "Less than one month ago, ND Department of Health spokesperson Dale Patrick told me personally the department would not move on the new radiation rules until next year. This week's action continues a pattern of a lack of concern for the public, and the Governor and the Legislature are letting them do it, by giving the Department of Health the latitude to "fill in the blanks" in how they manage waste in our state."

Reacting to the news at her home in Belfield, Dakota Resource Council Chair Linda Weiss said, "It is unfortunate that the North Dakota Department of Health chose to make this decision, dramatically changing the amount of radioactive waste in North Dakota. Time will tell whether this was the right choice for the future of North Dakota or the right choice, right now, for North Dakota's oil industry. While 50 picocuries per gram is judged by some oil industry experts to be a safe amount, the landfills that are already being permitted and built, like the one near me in Belfield, are designed to be large-scale industrial waste dumps accepting up to 500 tons of waste per day, seven days a week. This precedent will forever change the landscape of western North Dakota."

Also attending the meeting was Darrell Dorgan of Bismarck, a DRC member and spokesman for the North Dakota Energy Industry Waste Coalition said, "We are no longer on the edge of

ecological disaster. We've heard the drums for months now, and our state leaders just made certain North Dakota will be a Superfund site within the next five years. The Health Department's duty is to protect the health and welfare of our people. Instead, this decision benefits oil companies who complain that shipping the waste out of state is too expensive. Tons of radioactive waste have already been dumped, illegally. Now it's legal. Who will help future generations of taxpayers who are going to be charged with cleaning up this new Superfund site, formerly known as North Dakota?"