



DAKOTA RESOURCE COUNCIL

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NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota groups say State Health Department knew, but did little about radioactive waste

State has promised more aggressive action, but still follows hands-off approach

BISMARCK---Members of Dakota Resource Council (DRC) and the North Dakota Energy Industry Waste Coalition (NDEIWC) say they were not surprised the State Health Department had to be informed by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency about the discovery of radioactive filter bags near Watford City.

Spokesmen for both groups say, “We have been reporting illegally dumped radioactive waste to the State Health Department for over a year, but the state does little or nothing about it. Certainly, state rules regarding the handling of radioactive and toxic waste are not being enforced and tons of radioactive and cancer causing toxic waste have already been illegally dumped and more is on the way.”

NDEIWC Spokesman Darrell Dorgan says, “The role of the State Health Department is to protect the health and welfare of the people of North Dakota. In the past few years, that has changed and the concern now seems to be protecting and or increasing the profits of the state’s oil industry. That’s outrageous.”

DRC Executive Director Don Morrison says, “Radioactive waste being generated in the oil fields can contaminate water, food and it will cause cancer. And yet despite state laws requiring the out-of-state shipment of radioactive waste above five picocuries, the State Health Department is not enforcing the regulations and seems to have no idea what’s happening to the 75 tons of waste generated daily in the state’s oil fields.”

The two groups say the latest discovery of radioactive filter bags near Watford City further confirms the Health Department has no idea what is happening to the radioactive waste being in North Dakota’s oil patch.

Morrison notes, “We met with Health Department officials over seven months ago and at that time, despite state rules regarding disposal, Health Department officials could not tell us what was being done with the dangerous radioactive waste. We provided easy suggestions on how to insure the waste is handled to comply with state regulations and since then we have reported suspected continued violations in the Williston and Watford City areas.”

“Last year, state officials told us they would consider more aggressive enforcement. That has not happened,” Morrison said. “After the recent EPA report of radioactive waste, state officials have made similar statements about enforcement. Will they actually do it this time? Development of our oil resources needs to be done right. We’re eight years into this oil boom. Radioactive oil waste is something the state should have been prepared for.”

Dorgan said, "Recently it was reported that more than 1,100 radioactive filter bags were discovered in 2013 when trucking companies tried to illegally dump them at the municipal dump in Watford City. What happened after the trucks were turned away from Watford City? I think we just found out. The rest was likely handled by the 'mid-night express and dumped in ditches, creeks and dumpsters around the region. Hello cancer."

He notes that other filter bags and toxic waste is found daily across the Bakken region and yet there seems to be little if any prosecution, no enforcement by state officials. Despite state laws, the dumping is simply allowed, Laws designed to protect people are being violated while new regulations are being developed at the request of the oil industry.

Morrison and Dorgan say proposed new rules will likely be announced after a study by a nationally recognized lab is completed. Sources now predict the study will be done in September. That's 180 days at the earliest. With 75 tons radioactive of waste being generated daily, that's about 30 million pounds of cancer causing radioactive waste that will be illegally dumped someplace on sections lines, in ditches and rivers until new rules are developed.

Morrison says, "While local and federal officials appear to be doing their jobs, state officials continue to minimize the problems and make excuses. We have to ask once again, when is North Dakota state government going to step up and enforce the law on hazardous oil waste?"

The two say "the hands-off, hear no evil, see no evil means people will die in the future and someone at the state level needs to start acting responsibly."

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Founded in 1978, Dakota Resource Council is a statewide organization bringing together farmers, ranchers, small business owners, workers and other North Dakotans to address issues that affect their lives and livelihoods.