

Fertilizer or health hazard?

Health officials discuss land application of septage sewage

By **BRIAN J. EVANS**
Bellefontaine Examiner
Staff Writer

While some say it's the "best fertilizer known to man," others argue that dumping human sewage on farm fields is an unsafe practice that can cause serious health problems.

During a regular meeting Wednesday afternoon, the Logan County Board of Health continued its debate concerning the land application of septage waste.

And, for the second consecutive month, health officials tabled a decision concerning a countywide ban of the practice.

Several opponents and proponents of the practice appeared at the meeting, which became heated at times.

Ultimately, health officials asked Environmental Health Director Craig Kauffman to compose an executive summary to educate the board.

Mr. Kauffman recommends banning the land application of septage because, he said, new regulations from the Ohio Department of Health ban the practice.

"As of Jan. 1, the ODH set new regulations," Mr. Kauffman said. "It can always be changed in the future. All I know today is: We're in violation (without a ban)."

Board member Terry Stolly asked health officials to get an opinion from the board's statutory

legal counsel — Logan County Prosecutor Gerald Heaton — for the next meeting.

"If he says we are in the box here because of EPA mandates, let's know that for sure," Mr. Stolly said. "Maybe there are alternatives."

Affecting their decision, health officials said, are several issues including a lack of health district staff time to monitor land applications on a daily basis; a lack of approved land to apply septage; increased costs to the health district to regularly inspect hauler sites; and an increase to hauler registration fees (to pay for increased staff time).

Dr. Robert Davis of Mary Rutan Hospital's Department of Pathology, at the request of a local septage hauler, gave a presentation arguing that septage is an extremely valuable fertilizer.

Septage comes from septic tanks, he said, and it's one of the only products that can reestablish topsoil. Septage, he stressed, is different than sludge that comes from municipalities, which can be harmful.

Domestic septage is valuable on land," Dr. Davis said. "The bottom line: this is beneficial to the farmers that are growing crops. This is one of the only things that can reclaim topsoil; it has to be treated correctly. However, there are no grazing restrictions (for livestock) and it's very effective."

Dr. Davis said the county would be wasting free fertilizer by sending septage to a commercial refinery. Wastewater treatment plants in Russells Point and in Middleburg have agreed to receive septage at a cost of \$45 for 1,500 gallons, Mr. Kauffman said.

Health Commissioner Dr. Boyd Hoddinott agreed with Mr. Kauffman and he said the land application of septage has been

banned in several Ohio counties.

Dr. Davis' son, Maumee attorney R. Ethan Davis, defended the land application of septage and cited a court ruling from about 10 years ago that, he claimed, shows banning the land application is unconstitutional.

The decision on a ban was tabled last month because sewage haulers complained of having to haul across the county and said the ban would result in more fees for customers.

In other action, the board:

- issued Melvin Rockhold Jr., 433 Walker St., a citation to show cause why the board should not abate the nuisance and place costs as a lien;
- ordered the estate of Margaret MacDonald, in care of Dwayne Bradley, to demolish a house at 3078 State Route 540, and remove all solid waste within 60 days;
- ordered Doug Zupp, statutory agent/occupant, My Vision Investment LLC, 745 E. Columbus Ave., to demolish a house at 320 Union, Lakeview, and remove all solid waste within 30 days;
- ordered Joseph Ostermeyer, 442 Miami Ave., Russells Point, to remove a dilapidated shed within 14 days;
- ordered Mike Farley, 2519 County Road 12, to remove all solid waste, contaminated soil and empty standing water within seven days;
- ordered Jack Coyer of Lakeview to remove an open, vacant and dilapidated structure at 160 Church St., Lakeview, and tires and other solid waste within 30 days;
- granted Josiah Miller, 7959 N. U.S. Route 68, a variance to install a sewage treatment system within 12 inches of a seasonal high perched water table at the same location with condition of pretreatment;
- granted Thomas Clayton, 9016 Shady Drive, Lakeview, a variance to place a well within 10 feet of an abandoned well;
- approved the annual evaluation of nurse Diana Baughman with applicable pay step increase;
- accepted the resignation of home health supervisor Kelli Aldo and authorized posting of the position; and
- approved a fee increase to \$30 for private pay lead testing.

The board's next regular meeting is at 1 p.m. Wednesday, June 6.