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Local News

Neighbours set to fight plan to spread human waste on local field

A stink has erupted in Strathroy-Caradoc over a company's plan to empty human waste from septic tanks onto land near some



Calvi Leon • Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

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 22 Comments



Dwayne Wilson, the owner of a septic tank and repair company called The Stool Bus, plans to turn 14 acres on his property in Strathroy-Caradoc into a dumping site for waste. (CALVI LEON, The London Free Press)

A stink has erupted in Strathroy-Caradoc over a company's plan to empty human waste from septic tanks onto land near some residents who fear their water will become contaminated.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Spreading animal manure on farm fields is a

common, if pungent, practice in Southwestern Ontario, a way to get rid of the waste and fertilize fields at the same time. Dumping human waste is not as common, though.

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Try watching this video on www.youtube.com, or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

The owner of the Stool Bus, a septic tank service company, is looking to turn more than half of a 25-acre (10-hectare) field into a dumping site for sewage pumped from septic tanks. But some area residents say they're concerned about the potential environmental harm of the move, including to drinking water.

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“All the neighbours are concerned that if (the owner) throws human waste on his land, it’s going to end up contaminating the water source,” including drinking wells that neighbours rely on, said Laura Timbers-Purdy, the owner of the property next to the proposed dumping site.

“It’s dangerous to the animals. It’s dangerous to the people. If (E. coli) gets in your water source, it can kill people.”

E. coli bacteria, which lives in the intestines of humans and animals, can cause problems if it

washes into untreated water sources, as it did in Walkerton in 2000 when farm runoff entered a well whose chlorinator wasn't working and contaminated the town's water supply. Seven people were killed and thousands sickened in the disaster.

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STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The proposed dumping site is 14 acres (5.6 hectares) on Falconbridge Drive just east of Strathroy, an area residents say is close to waterways, including drinking wells, and a municipal drain not far from the back of the property.

“I’ve told all the neighbours: You better get water samples and check the E. coli level,” said Brian Derbyshire, a nearby resident who rents the land next door.

“We actually have one pasture (for cattle) that is upstream (of the proposed site), so it’s possible it wouldn’t affect them, but we have another pasture that houses 30 to 45 cattle, which is downstream,” he said.

Disposing of sewage in fields is nothing new

in rural Ontario, said Dwayne Wilson, owner of the Stool Bus company, who said he was taken aback by the critical reaction to the proposal.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“I’m really surprised there have been as many people as there was reacting to this, considering it’s already in the neighbourhood. We’ve dumped for 30 years, five kilometres away from there in Strathroy-Caradoc,” he said, adding the company stopped after the site’s landowner decided to grow vegetables instead.

Wilson said the waste is collected from septic

tanks at homes and some businesses across Middlesex, Elgin and Lambton counties. On a busy day, the company disposes of nearly 6,000 gallons of water and sewage mixed, he said.

“It’s the same as spreading out (animal) manure or anything on that field,” he said, referring to a common farm fertilizing practice.

About 1.2 million residents in Ontario rely on private wastewater services that use on-site septic systems or holding tanks, with the majority located in rural regions. As of January 2020, there were more than 300 approved hauled sewage waste disposal sites in the province.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Approval is required by Ontario's environment ministry for septic tank pumping services to dump waste at approved sites. The ministry also spells out requirements such as minimum setbacks from residential areas and roads.

“(The proposed site) is 300 feet away from any water, and it doesn't slope towards any of that area,” Wilson said, saying it meets the ministry's regulations.

“I get a lot of people questioning this scenario about dumping on land and contaminating water sources. Well, there isn't any around where we're dealing, and by building code, sewage is allowed to be within 100 feet of a bored well and 50 feet of a drilled well.”

If approved, Wilson said the 14-acre waste site would allow his company to reduce costs including travel times, hauling the waste directly to his own land rather than to a

treatment plant in London.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Concerned residents say they contacted the municipality and the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority, which manages the area's watershed, but were told the Environment Ministry is responsible for the approval process.

“They say we can't do anything until it's either approved or disapproved,” and then after, “(they can) put their stipulations on it,” Derbyshire said.

The proposal was posted to the ministry's

environmental registry website for public comment and is under review.

“We’re aware residents have concerns,” said Jennifer Huff, Strathroy-Carodoc’s director of building and planning. “We’ve reached out to (the ministry) ourselves to understand their approval process and information they’re looking for prior to issuing permits for these things.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The type of soil involved, where nearby groundwater is located and distances from natural heritage features are among the

factors considered for such a proposal, Huff said.

Regardless of whether the dumping site is approved, Derbyshire said, this raises bigger concerns about the entire practice of dumping sewage waste from septic tanks.

“I cannot believe we’re dumping raw human sewage anywhere in this province,” he said. “I think every city has a treatment plant, so what are we doing?”

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NEWEST



Irene V · JULY 28, 2021

It should be clarified that this application is for a "raw sewage disposal site" to spread raw untreated sewage (not treated biosolids) on to land, near streams, etc. The rate of application is much larger than manure used for nutrient management of

fields for crops. This sewage will have pathogens and toxins (such as heavy metals). To give an idea of what the pollutant land application may look like, let's look at a site in Lambton county (ERO #019-3488) approved I believe to spread up to 15 litres per square meter per 7 days between April 1 and November 30 (32 weeks). $32 \text{ weeks} \times 15 \text{ litres} = 480 \text{ litres}$ per square meter by my calculation. If you visualize that amount on the land, it would be 48 centimeters high of septage per year!

REPLY



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Irene V · JULY 28, 2021

I wasn't aware that he was approved for a dumping site previously, where now he says vegetables are growing. I don't think I will ever enjoy eating vegetables again. Also animals can graze 3 to 6 months after the dump site has stopped spreading raw untreated sewage. Certainly gives me less faith in our food supply!

REPLY



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Charlie # Won · JULY 28, 2021

Great company name though.

REPLY



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Harvey Easton · JULY 27, 2021

"I cannot believe we are dumping raw human sewage anywhere in this province" Derbyshire said.

Um, when it rains hard and London's sewage plants get overwhelmed, guess what happens?

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2 REPLIES

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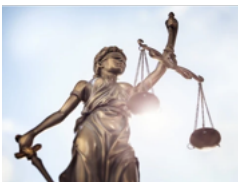
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