

Myths vs. Facts About Hog Pollution

Myth: Hog factories do not discharge waste into streams or rivers

FACT: Hog factories discharge waste into streams and rivers in several ways.

- ✓ State inspectors documented **more than 115 illegal discharges from hog waste lagoons** in the first nine months of 1998. At least 32 of these discharges reached surface waters.
- ✓ **Hog waste runs off from farm fields into nearby streams.** So far in 1998, state inspectors have found that more than 200 hog factories have sprayed too much waste on their land, virtually assuring that this waste will leach into groundwater and runoff into nearby waterways. Hog factories are not required to install buffers along streams to reduce the amount of waste runoff.
- ✓ **Waste can and does leak from lagoons and sprayfields into shallow groundwater** which, in turn, often flows through the ground into nearby streams.
- ✓ **Hog factories also emit into the air huge amounts of unregulated ammonia nitrogen gas.** This nitrogen then is redeposited onto the landscape and waterways, choking rivers and estuaries already impaired by too much nitrogen (Aneja, 1998; Rudek, 1997).



Myth: Hog factories do not threaten neighbors' drinking wells

FACT: Hog factories can and do contaminate groundwater supplies - and neighbors' drinking wells - from both leaky waste lagoons and sprayfields.

- ✓ A 1998 analysis by the state found that more than 10% of private wells tested near factory hog and chicken farms were **contaminated with excessive levels of nitrates** (Rudo, 1998). (Nitrates are toxic and can be especially dangerous to infants.)
- ✓ Follow-up investigations have linked hog production facilities with some of these contaminated wells; additional investigations are ongoing to determine the extent to which hog farms are to blame for other contaminated wells.
- ✓ No one knows just how much is leaking from the nearly 4,000 lagoons in North Carolina because **hog factories are not required to monitor leakage from lagoons.**

Myth: Only a very few "bad actors" in the hog industry violate state water quality laws; most hog companies obey all laws and don't pollute

FACT: In 1997, 88 percent of all factory hog farms had at least one permit or waste management plan violation. Ten percent actually had water quality violations.

- ✓ So far in 1998, state inspectors have found **over 1,366 plan and permit violations.** Of these, state officials found waste being discharged from 115 waste lagoons, 599 lagoons that were too full, and 224 cases where factories sprayed too much waste on already saturated fields (North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources; N.C. Dept. Env't. and Nat. Res., 1998).
- ✓ These numbers surely underestimate the actual number of problems because **hog factories are only inspected twice a year!**

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Myth: Municipal sewage treatment plants cause more nutrient pollution than hog factories

FACT: Agricultural runoff, including runoff from hog and other factory livestock operations, continues to be the number one source of nutrient pollution in North Carolina and throughout much of the country.

- ✓ **Hog factories pour more nitrogen pollution** (as ammonia) into the air of the coastal region than all of the municipal and industrial sources combined.
- ✓ In the Neuse River Basin, **farm runoff contributes at least 56% of the nitrogen loading to the river** -- this doesn't even include the estimated 2 million pounds of nitrogen delivered directly to the Neuse estuary from air pollution from hog factories alone.
- ✓ Municipal plants, while a problem, contribute no more than 24% of the nitrogen in the Neuse River (Rudek, 1997).



Myth: Hog factories are being unfairly singled out for regulation

FACT: Hog factories were virtually unregulated until 1993, when modest rules were adopted requiring factory hog operations to develop waste management plans.

- ✓ Since then, additional rules have been adopted for factory hog farms but few of these are as far-reaching as the rules that apply to municipal sewage treatment plants and other industrial polluters.
- ✓ Sewage treatment plants and other industrial polluters have been subject to state and federal requirements, including strict technology and monitoring requirements, for decades.
- ✓ **No laws exist to deal with the huge amount of ammonia sent into the air by hog factories** (about 168 million tons a year), while other industrial sources are subject to strict controls on the emission of air pollutants.

Myth: Odor from hog factories is not really not that bad – and besides, there's no scientific basis supporting neighbors' claims of offensive odors

FACT: No one questions that odor is difficult to measure, but available research confirms that there are offensive odors and air pollution associated with hog factories.

- ✓ The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has issued warnings for several years to workers in animal confinement operations about **job-related asthma and the threat of death from manure-pit gases** if ventilation systems fail to work adequately.
- ✓ In Iowa, a study found neighbors of hog facilities had **respiratory problems** similar to those of workers in hog confinement operations (Donham, 1998).
- ✓ Studies also have found **psychological stress** in residents near hog factories that is related to frequent exposure to intense hog odors.
- ✓ A study of North Carolina residents who had lived by hog factories an average of five years reported **significantly more tension, depression, anger, and fatigue** than residents not exposed to hog odor at home (Schiffman, 1998).
- ✓ In a 1998 report, a team of University of North Carolina researchers stated, "We must undertake an aggressive initiative to address issues of odor nuisance and potential health effects associated with odors" (U.N.C., Board of Governors, 1998).
- ✓ The truth of this is best told by the people, like Karen Priest, a working mother of two, whose Bladen County home is surrounded by hog factories: "I feel like I'm raising my kids in one of those third world countries that we see some celebrity on TV trying to raise money for because of the sewage

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running through their village. It's been nearly four years since I opened the windows of my own home" (6/11/98).

Myth: Environmental regulations are killing family farm jobs and causing the hog industry to lose money in North Carolina

FACT: Hog factories were virtually unregulated before 1993. Since the advent of modest environmental regulations in 1993, the number of new factory hog farms has risen steadily and the total number of hogs has almost doubled.

- ✓ The industrialization of pork production, the trend toward vertical integration (i.e., a small number of pork hog companies involved in more than one phase of hog production), and other changes within the hog industry are the major reasons that **the number of individual, independent hog farms has decreased by more than 50% since the late 1980s.**
- ✓ Many of these farms went out of business before 1993, before regulations were first put in place.
- ✓ According to recent news stories, **overproduction** (too much pork on the market) has led to the lowest hog prices in years, which, in turn, may force additional hog farmers out of business.

Myth: North Carolina is the single most regulated state for hogs in the nation

FACT: Absolutely not true! While in recent years North Carolina has adopted some meaningful laws and regulations governing factory hog farms, other states have adopted tighter controls.

- ✓ **Setbacks.** South Carolina adopted much stricter limitations on how close hog factories can be to homes, schools, drinking wells, and waterways. A number of other states also have stricter setbacks, including Oklahoma which prohibits hog factories from locating closer than three miles from a public water supply, one mile of an ecologically important waterway, and up to two miles from a neighbor's property.
- ✓ **Liability.** In Kentucky, major pork companies that own the hogs are held liable for violations, but not so in North Carolina. Some states have laws requiring pork producers to post bonds to ensure that abandoned waste lagoons are cleaned up, but not North Carolina.
- ✓ **Permitting.** Several states have stricter permitting requirements and mandatory odor abatement planning requirements.
- ✓ **Standards.** Other states are beginning to tighten up technology requirements for hog factories. For example, Colorado now requires that waste lagoons be covered to reduce odors and cut down on ammonia emissions to the air. Open-air waste lagoons are the norm in North Carolina.

For more information go to <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/go/hogwatch>