

100 Upper Mount Bethel residents sue sludge provider, farmers



These signs warn of the use of biosolids on fields off Tatamy Road near Van Buren Road in Palmer Township. (Rudy Miller | lehighvalleylive.com)



By **John Best** | For lehighvalleylive.com

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Residents living near farms in **Upper Mount Bethel Township** where sewage sludge has been used as fertilizer in the last year are suing the farmers, landowners and several divisions of the sludge provider.

One hundred plaintiffs and about a dozen defendants are named in a nearly 300-page lawsuit filed Monday that includes 146 pages of complaints and alleged damages against Synagro Technologies Inc. and the property owners.

Plaintiff John Gorman said irritating odors have caused burning in neighbors' eyes, noses and throats. Drinking water wells have been contaminated, he said.

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"It's not safe and it's making people sick," said Gorman, who is president of the group Sludge-Free UMBT. "It's as simple as that."

Sewage sludge, also known as biosolids, is the combination of residential, commercial and industrial sewage waste from wastewater treatment plants, which can then be used as an inexpensive and often free fertilizer for farms.

"Plaintiffs have endured pain and suffering, have suffered economic loss, including expenses to mitigate the significant adverse impact for defendants' sewage sludge land applications, and they will continue to incur such expenses in the future," the lawsuit says.



Open gate farm tour set for Oct. 8-9

The Northampton County Open Gate Farm Tour will be held Oct. 8-9.

Earlier this year, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, which regulates the use of biosolids, **agreed to a settlement** with the Delaware Riverkeeper Network and Sludge-Free Upper Mount Bethel Township that stated Class B biosolids would not be applied at several properties owned by Ron Angle in Upper Mount Bethel Township.

Class A biosolids, which do not require DEP permitting, have been applied to several farms in the township in 2015 and 2016. Class A material is supposed to be free of disease-causing pathogens, unlike Class B.

The lawsuit claims Class A biosolids were improperly applied to three farms in the township, including two owned by Angle at Potomac Street and Sunrise Boulevard, and at Sunrise Boulevard and Sagen Drive.

Another property where Quiet Valley Road intersects with Belvedere Corner Road and Red Fox Lane is also named.

The plaintiffs' attorney, John Kotsatos, said a lawsuit of this size would likely go to a jury, which would determine the amount of any punitive damages.

Angle said he is considering a countersuit since he has to keep going back to court over the same issues.

"These people want to dictate what farmers do," Angle said. "They didn't want Class B and we agreed. Now, they don't want (Class) A. These people ought to be thanking farmers, not harassing them."

John Best is a freelance writer. Find [lehighvalleylive on Facebook](#).