

# City and County Beat

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Keeping tabs on what's going on at Austin City Hall and with the Travis County Commissioners.

## Sludge coming to southeastern Travis County?

By [Suzannah Gonzales](#) | Tuesday, October 26, 2010, 01:57 PM

### UPDATE:

Travis County commissioners voted this evening to deny Synagro of Texas-CDR Inc.'s request for variances to put sewage sludge from wastewater treatment on agricultural pastureland near the community of Garfield in southeastern Travis County.

Synagro failed to prove that the sludge could not be located at other sites and did not assure that they would mitigate adverse effects from the proposal, County Judge Sam Biscoe said before the vote.

The 4-0 vote followed a discussion behind closed doors. Commissioner Mararget Gómez was absent for the vote.

**EARLIER:**

Travis County commissioners will discuss behind closed doors today whether to grant variances to Synagro of Texas-CDR Inc. so that sewage sludge from wastewater treatment can be used on agricultural pastureland near the community of Garfield in southeastern Travis County.

The matter was discussed during a public hearing this morning. Commissioners may take action after executive session this afternoon.

During the public hearing, a few residents who live in the area spoke against the proposal and said that 60 people would be affected. County Judge Sam Biscoe noted that a petition from residents has been submitted. Site maps show that petitioners live along Navarro Creek Road and are not among the properties that would be affected by the proposal.

Permits for the proposal are pending with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, county staff told commissioners. One of three permits have been approved.

The sludge would be used as “soil amendment and substitute for inorganic fertilizer” on land totaling about 435 acres owned by local property owners who are providing Synagro access and permission, according to a county memo. Synagro is requesting variances to apply the sludge closer than the normal setback from individual residences and within a floodplain, but at least 200 feet from all surface waters.

County staff advised commissioners to consider the odor of the sludge and the nutrients that would get into waterways that staff said would be beneficial.

Synagro expects the source of the sludge to be from City of Austin facilities, the memo says, but the sources could vary.

**Comments**

By lcspruce

October 26, 2010 4:28 PM |

send to the governor mansion there are use to the sh\_t. that flows through there. well what's left of it.

By Helane Shields

October 26, 2010 4:35 PM |

Sewage sludge contains hazardous industrial wastes and virulent antibiotic resistant pathogens. A newly discovered sludge threat are infectious human and animal prions (think mad cow disease, Creutzfeldt Jakob, etc.)

Scientists now confirm that Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is a transmissible prion disease suffered by 5.3 million victims with a new case every 70 seconds.  
[www.sludgevictims.com/pathogens/ALZHEIMERS-CJD-samepriondisease.pdf](http://www.sludgevictims.com/pathogens/ALZHEIMERS-CJD-samepriondisease.pdf)

Human and animal prion diseases including AD, are transmissible by blood, urine and feces.

"Further research by the team showed that, if inflammation is induced in any excretory organ of the body, prions are excreted in whatever substance the organ excretes." (Dr. Adriano Aguzzi, Univ. of Zurich)  
[bacteriality.com/2008/05/05/prions/](http://bacteriality.com/2008/05/05/prions/)

The US EPA acknowledges that the wastewater treatment process does not inactivate prions. It reconcentrates them in the sewage sludge.  
[www.sludgevictims.com/pdf/files/PRIONSINSEWAGEANDSLUDGE PEDERSEN\\_ETAL.pdf](http://www.sludgevictims.com/pdf/files/PRIONSINSEWAGEANDSLUDGE PEDERSEN_ETAL.pdf)

In a September 2008 report, the US EPA lists prions eight times as one of the emerging contaminants of concern in sludge biosolids.  
[www.epa.gov/waterscience/strategy/compendium.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/strategy/compendium.pdf) Scientists have found prions can become 680 times more infectious in certain soils and survive for years. Human prions are 100,000 times more infectious than animal prions.

In the July 3, 2010 issue of VETERINARY RECORD, renown Univ. of Wisconsin researcher Dr. Pedersen stated: "Finally, the disposal of sludge was considered to represent the greatest risk of spreading (prion) infectivity to other premises."

Sludge topdressed on grazing lands, hay fields and dairy pastures poses risk of prion infections to wildlife and livestock. Class A sludge "biosolids" spread in public parks, playgrounds, and home gardens poses prion risks to humans, including soil on greens and vegetables, "eat dirt" children, and family pets which carry sludge pathogens into homes on the feet and fur. An infective dose is so small, it is measured in molecules.

Helane Shields, PO Box 1133, Alton, NH 03809 603-875-3842  
[hshields@worldpath.net](mailto:hshields@worldpath.net) [www.sludgevictims.com](http://www.sludgevictims.com)  
Prions in sewage sludge "biosolids"  
[www.sludgevictims.com/pathogens/prion.html](http://www.sludgevictims.com/pathogens/prion.html)

By Fiftycal

October 26, 2010 5:08 PM |

Wow! A cut and paste "expert" tells us all about her "faith" that "prions" cause MAD COW disease, Aids and the heartbreak of psoriasis. Uh huh. Must be looking for somebody to SUE!

By Helane Shields

October 26, 2010 5:55 PM |

I don't operate on "faith" - but on verifiable scientific facts published in peer reviewed journals authored by prion researchers who have received millions of dollars from the Dept. of Defense, National Science Foundation and US EPA to study prion infectivity in humans, animals, sewage sludge and other environmental matrices. [ "An environmental chemist, (Dr. Joel) Pedersen joined a team of UW researchers who in 2003 landed more than \$5 million in grants from the U.S. Department of Defense to probe the disease. " [www.grow.uwcalcommunication.com/2007/09/18/hello-world/](http://www.grow.uwcalcommunication.com/2007/09/18/hello-world/) ]

Recent revelations that Alzheimer's Disease is an incurable, infectious prion disease which is transmissible in blood, the same as Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease, has made the issue all the more grave because of the risk of iatrogenic transmission in medical settings (dentistry, ophthalmology, surgery, endoscopy, etc.) Autoclaving does not totally inactivate prions on medical instruments. More drastic chemical and other attempts to sterilize can harm or destroy the instruments resulting in costly disposal.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transmissible\\_spongiform\\_encephalopathy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transmissible_spongiform_encephalopathy)

(prions) may be transmitted through contact with infected tissue, body fluids, or contaminated medical instruments. Normal sterilization procedures such as boiling or irradiating materials fail to render prions non-infective.

[/www.rense.com/general52/um.htm](http://www.rense.com/general52/um.htm)

The only effective sterilization technique is steam pressure sterilization ... However, even this method is not foolproof. In 2001 a major hospital in Denver reported the exposure of CJD to 6 neurosurgery patients as a result of the use of CJD contaminated surgical instruments after autoclaving. As a result they have changed their procedure to include disposal of all surgical instruments used on a known or suspected CJD patient. Other medical centers are known to double autoclave these surgical instruments. Incineration, is also effective but obviously destroys equipment along with the organism.

By Bitsy

October 26, 2010 8:51 PM |

I don't care what any study says or what this or that 'expert' says....I don't want the s\*\*t in my area. How many times have you heard that it won't smell, won't harm pets or people, safe for food....blah, blah, blah. Common sense should prevail . If you don't want it in your own front yard, and I feel strongly that the executive staff at Synagro or any of the Commissioners would not want it in their yards, why would it be ok to put in mine???

By Nick

October 26, 2010 9:16 PM |

Commissioner Gomez not present? I never would have guessed. I think she's actually attended maybe one or two meetings this year. Her running for

reelection was really doing a disservice to the residents of her precinct. Alvarez would have been a much better choice.

By Wyatt

October 29, 2010 11:58 AM |

First and foremost, if you are not a specialist in this particular topic there is no need to cut and paste information on here to fit your beliefs. You can find two sides to every argument and if you are intelligent enough you will take on information from both sides and use your common sense to figure it all out. If you have not at least witnessed the results of something for yourself and done your own research then you have no right to speak. Bio solids are one of the most economical items we have today to use as a fertilizer. Yes they have an awful odor, but it does dissipate quickly. They are high in several of the limiting macro nutrients that growing crops remove from the soil. The bio solids act on the soil in such a way that crop productions are effected for seasons after it is applied. For all of you environmental friendly folks out there, it is a natural product. Yes it has some impurities but do you think that the chemically synthesized fertilizers don't? I have no opposition to using other fertilizers but this is the cheapest option by far. As for our little prion crisis, I have no idea where these sources are doing their research. Sunlight kills prions! End of story. Medically speaking, autoclaving also kills them if it is done properly. (not like they do it in Mexico) If you are using this product as a livestock producer, you surely would have the common sense to move your livestock to another location. Beyond all of these shallow assumptions and un-researched beliefs, in response to the actual article, I believe that this was a good call by the commissioners because it is stated that this piece of land is within a flood plain. If they did get the permit and the application was executed, the result from runoff contamination would have a severe impact on the surrounding environment.

In many cases in agriculture (like this one) it's the smaller things that catch the attention of others. It wasn't the method of application or the conditions of the application that bothered people. It is the material itself and the unfamiliarity of its benefits. If people continue to hinder our ability to use cheap products to grow food for your table, you can expect to see the price of an ear of corn continue to increase. So if this thought and smell is so appalling that you would rather pay much more for the common commodities of life, you can use baby powder to fertilize your own garden. Its prion free, but don't have high expectations. P.S. Helane Shields, if you are that concerned about this, you should look up what all is on your toothbrush before you brush your teeth again... I would hate for you to not know.

By Jim Bynum

October 30, 2010 10:43 AM |

Wyatt is right that people should research the subject. Ask what fecal coliform are? It is the name of a test for less than 5% of thermotolerant *E. coli* and *Klebsiella*. Ask what coliform are? It is a test for 30 pathogenic members of gram negative Enterobacteriaceae family that include *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *Klebsiella*. Ask what MPN means in the fecal coliform test? It means the average Most Probable Number of thermotolerant *E. coli* and *Klebsiella* placed on 7 laboratory culture media plates at the beginning of the tests — based on counting colonies at the end of the test. We had to quit farming after bacteria from a sludge site contaminated our farm. A fecal coliform test revealed extremely low levels. However, both *E. coli* and *Salmonella* levels were over 800,000 colonies per hundred grams of soil one year after the last sludge application. Would you want to live on the farm, eat the vegetables off it or graze your cattle on it? Here is a scanned copy of the tests.  
[www.thewatchers.us/pathogens/test-comparison.html](http://www.thewatchers.us/pathogens/test-comparison.html)