

Midwest Environmental A D V O C A T E S

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Contacts: Melissa Scanlan, Attorney and Executive Director (608) 268-0208
Angie Newberg, Concerned Citizens of Adams County (608) 339-7303

Lawsuit Forces Department of Commerce and Adams County to Give Up Public Records on Proposed Beef Slaughterhouse

Madison and Friendship, Wisconsin. Orders issued by the Circuit Courts for Dane and Adams Counties on April 1, 2002, approved two settlements that required the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and Adams County Rural and Industrial Development Commission to release public records related to a proposed large beef slaughterhouse in Adams County.

The action resulted from two lawsuits filed by Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc. on behalf of the Concerned Citizens of Adams County, a grassroots group in Adams County that is educating the public about the environmental and social impacts of the proposed slaughterhouse.

The slaughterhouse proposal may include plans to kill 1,000 head per day, bring in 25,000 cattle in additional feedlots, create 45 acres of wastewater treatment pits, and install a new ethanol plant. The industrial beef complex is proposed to be located on the outskirts of Adams, Wisconsin, a city of about 1,700 residents.

Despite formal requests made under Wisconsin's Open Records law to both the Adams County Rural and Industrial Development Commission and the Wisconsin Department of Commerce for more information, both agencies refused to release any records related to the proposed industrial beef complex until they were sued.

"I am outraged that we were left in the dark by our public agencies while they planned this project for more than two years," said Angie Newberg, City of Adams resident and member of Concerned Citizens of Adams County. "If this is such a great project, why has it been so hard to get anyone to tell us about it?"

"The Open Records Law requires the government to provide public records to any citizen who requests them. This is a prerequisite to having a functioning democracy," stated Melissa Scanlan, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates and attorney for the grassroots organization. "It is disappointing that citizens need to resort to the courts in order to exercise their basic rights to be educated about proposed projects and participate in decision making," she added.

Within two months of the filing of the lawsuits, the agencies turned over the documents and agreed to pay the environmental organization's legal fees.

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