

Midwest Environmental  
ADVOCATES

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**DAIRY FARMS CAUSE FISH KILLS IN TRIBUTARIES TO EAU PLEINE RIVER**

**Lack of Controls on Agricultural Runoff Damage the Community's Water**

WAUSAU, WI Poor manure management by two dairy producers in Marathon County caused fish kills in tributaries to the Eau Pleine River on September 28<sup>th</sup> and October 10<sup>th</sup> of this year. Both incidents were caused by producers who applied too much manure too close to a stream.

The producers had applied the manure so thickly that it formed ponds in the fields and ran off into Porky Creek and an unnamed tributary to the Eau Pleine River. DNR investigators found manure in both creeks and documented fish kills at both sites, including dead "Green Sunfish, Brook Stickleback, Fathead Minnows, Mud Minnows, Creek chubs, Blunt Nose Minnows, Fantail Darters, Sucker and Cray Fish." The DNR only fined each producer \$405.80.

"Although most farmers are responsible land stewards and the pillars of our community, these fish kills highlight the need for stronger controls on manure management," according to Melissa K. Scanlan, Legal Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates. She added that, "As farms expand and produce greater amounts of manure to apply to fields every year, the need intensifies for rules regulating manure management."

"Both producers here had Nutrient Management Plans," noted Dr. David Zaber, Resource Ecologist with Wisconsin's Environmental Decade Institute.

The DNR investigation found that even if Keith Rahm had followed his Nutrient Management Plan and incorporated the waste within 72 hours, it would not have prevented these kills; the manure was spread so thick that it ran off the site into Porky Creek within 24 hours.

According to Dr. Zaber, "These events show that we need non-point rules requiring incorporation before waste can run off into waterways. These fish kills were entirely preventable."

Another issue that has been debated during the non-point rule redesign is creation of vegetated buffers between surface waters and cropland. The September fish kill in Porky Creek involved applying manure 100 feet away from the creek. The October fish kill involved applying manure five feet from the stream. "Vegetated buffers and manure application setbacks along streams could have greatly reduced the chance that manure would reach these creeks," said Dr. Zaber.

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