



DEQ fines Port of Morrow \$1.3 million for groundwater contamination

'These are serious violations of water quality regulations' says agency

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has fined the Port of Morrow \$1.3 million for repeatedly overapplying wastewater containing nitrogen to agricultural fields and failing to monitor those fields in the Lower Umatilla Basin, a news release from the DEQ said Tuesday.

Groundwater is used as a primary drinking water source by residents in the basin, which spans northern Morrow and Umatilla counties. "High levels of nitrate in drinking water is linked with serious health concerns, particularly for infants and pregnant women," the release said.

The Port of Morrow collects wastewater from food processors, storage facilities and data centers in its industrial park outside Boardman. The port has a DEQ water quality permit that allows it to use the nitrogen-rich wastewater beneficially for irrigation on nearby farms, but the permit includes limits on how much nitrogen can be applied to the farmland and how much nitrate can be present in soil prior to applications.

According to the DEQ, the port violated these limits more than a thousand times, resulting in approximately 165 tons of excess nitrogen being applied between 2018-2021. The port also failed to monitor nitrogen



Wastewater generated by businesses at the Port of Morrow is used to irrigate farmland.

at application sites on 121 separate occasions each year from 2018 to 2020.

"These are serious violations of water quality regulations that are in place to protect public health and the environment," said Leah Feldon, DEQ deputy director. "The existing nitrate contamination in the basin's groundwater means everyone in the region has to do their part to reduce this contamination. The Port of Morrow has not been doing its part, and DEQ looks forward to working together to correct these violations and protect our aquifers from future contamination," Feldon added.

Nitrogen limits prevent overapplication and ensure nitrates don't filter down through the soil into groundwater. Nitrogen is

a beneficial plant nutrient but applying too much can contribute to groundwater contamination, said the agency.

According to the DEQ, drinking water with high levels of nitrates can increase risk of methemoglobinemia, or blue baby syndrome, especially for infants who drink baby formula mixed with water containing nitrate above the safe level.

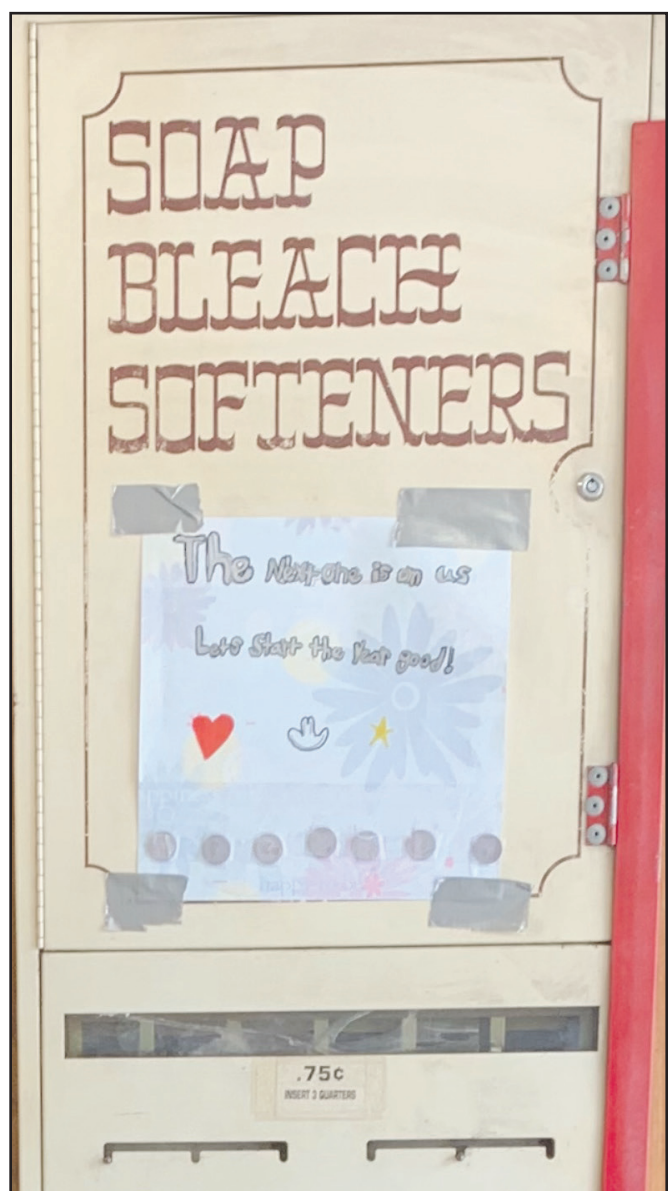
The DEQ identified the Port of Morrow's wastewater as one of many sources contributing to nitrate contamination in the area's groundwater. The primary source of contamination is fertilizer use on irrigated farmland, followed by confined animal feeding operations such as dairies, pastures, food processing wastewater systems and

septic systems.

The DEQ said it is working with the Port of Morrow and other industrial facilities in the area to ensure appropriate and agronomic irrigation practices during the non-growing season when crop uptake of nitrate is minimal. There is increased risk of nitrate reaching groundwater during the non-growing season.

Reducing groundwater nitrate contamination from food processors is a goal of the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA) Second Local Action Plan, which was finalized in October 2020. The port and other local businesses and organizations contributed to the development of that action plan.

Local kids are "Paying It Forward"



A sign was left in the laundromat with quarters taped on, reading "The next one is on us. Let's start the year good!"

By Hannah Finch

Children from Heppner have recently been paying it forward to the community anonymously. A sign with quarters taped on it was spotted in the laundromat, free for anyone to use. A similar sign was seen in the post office with stamps stapled to it. The children also chipped in \$20 to pay for someone's meal, all done without seeking recognition.

The children's purpose was to show acts of kindness beyond the everyday things. They wanted to go out of their way to really help people in the community. The children hoped that when these small acts

were noticed, people would follow their lead and pay it forward, creating a wave of kindness.

The community caught on quickly. The post office reported that other people have been adding stamps to the sign. Though these good deeds may easily go unnoticed, the rippling effect that they create have the power to change people's lives for the better.

The family insisted that it wasn't really about these kids doing these random acts of kindness, but more about lifting people's spirits up. "It's about having everyone doing these seemingly small things and paying it forward."

County wants wind turbine lighting fixed

Red lights should stop flashing with no planes around

By David Sykes

The red flashing aircraft warning lights on top of the recently built wind towers in south Morrow County should shut automatically off when no airplanes are around; but they don't, and the county wants that fixed, commissioners said at their meeting last week.

Commercial pilot Wayne Seitz, who lives near the towers, was at the meeting and said the lights are on more than they are off. "Something is not working right," he told the commissioners. Seitz said most aircraft flying over (the wind towers) are at 32 to 38 thousand feet and planes flying that high should not trip the system and turn on the warning lights. Seitz, who is a certified instrument flight instructor with advanced ratings, said FAA standards indicate all that



Constantly flashing red lights on top of the Wheatridge wind towers are an annoyance to neighbors, and should shut down.

is needed for a plane to trip the system and cause the red lights to come on is to be within three nautical miles and 1,000 feet, but that is not happening, and the lights stay on all the time. "They are on more than they are off," he emphasized.

Seitz knows firsthand the effects of the always on lights. "I am a neighbor to Wheatridge and from my house anywhere you walk around through any windows you look out you can see the lights," he said. "In my bed at night looking out the window I can see them.

The problem is the lights don't shut off like they are supposed to. They are supposed to go out, which isn't very often," he said. Commissioners said they are also hearing complaints from other people about the bright lights being on all night. Commissioner Melissa Lindsay, who can also see the towers from her home, said, "The last couple of months there has been no off."

The special on demand lighting system, required by the county when NextEra built the Wheatridge wind farm, was designed

to cut down on the amount of visual pollution caused by the constantly flashing red lights, which is the type installed on all earlier built wind farms. NextEra agreed to put in the special on-demand system after county commissioner and pilot Don Russell insisted it be part of the company's agreement to receive special tax breaks from the county. However, commissioners are learning the system isn't operating

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Another sign with free stamps stapled to it was found in the post office. "Need a stamp... Take a stamp. Happy new year!"

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