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Bentley area: Toxic gas detected at huge hog farm

Andrea Maynard
Advocate staff
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Toxic gas exceeding provincial guidelines has been detected near a massive Bentley hog farm.

Parkland Airshed Management Zone (PAMZ) found hydrogen sulphide levels near the Bacon Acres farm exceeded guidelines for 26 hours between May 10 and June 10.

"It's a very big deal," said PAMZ program manager Kevin Warren, who revealed the findings to Red Deer's environmental advisory board Tuesday.

Warren said PAMZ set up a portable air monitoring station 1.6 km north of Bacon Acres after hearing concerns about odours from residents in Lacombe and Ponoka counties.

The 2,500-hog operation, located one km south of town, has been a bone of contention among residents for years.

In the one month of PAMZ air monitoring, hydrogen sulphur exceeded hourly guidelines for 26 hours, said Warren. The wind was coming from the direction of Bacon Acres for 21 of those hours.

Warren said the results were disturbing because in two years of prior PAMZ monitoring throughout Central Alberta, hydrogen sulphide was found to exceed guidelines for only three hours.

PAMZ, which monitors air quality across Central Alberta, alerted the provincial government. Alberta Environment and the Natural Resources Conservation Board conducted an on-site investigation. The government investigation continues.

It's not the first time the government has been involved with Bacon Acres. In April 2001, the government promised \$250,000 to study whether Bacon Acres' barns can be outfitted with special filters to minimize odours released.

Hydrogen sulphide, which is easy to detect by odour, can be produced by anaerobic bacteria present in manure.

In lethal concentrations, it will quickly paralyze the nerves responsible for smell. A strong dose will also paralyze the nerves controlling the diaphragm and cause suffocation.

Hydrogen sulphide levels at the Alberta Environment-run monitoring station in Red Deer exceeded guidelines for two hours last Feb. 9.

Warren said PAMZ has been unable to receive explanations from Alberta Environment.