

EPA opens hearings on herbicide atrazine

by [Bob Kelleher](#), Minnesota Public Radio

St. Paul, Minn. — The EPA has opened hearings on the safety of the farm herbicide atrazine and some Minnesota farmers are defending the product.

The Natural Resources Defense Council says atrazine is known to be harmful to wildlife and probably to humans. The herbicide is used primarily to kill grassy and broadleaf weeds in corn and soybean fields. Atrazine is the most commonly detected water pollutant in U.S. agricultural regions.

But Warren Formo with the Minnesota Agricultural Water Coalition, said the trend is improving.

"Educational efforts and best management practices developed by farmers and organizations have helped to reduce the concentrations of atrazine in our waters," Formo said.

Tim Dritz, vice president of the Minnesota Corn Growers Association, said atrazine already cleared exhaustive studies. He said the herbicide is a key component in modern farming practices intended to save fuel and conserve soil.

"I personally use atrazine once in a while," Dritz said. "We have switched to conservation tillage practices over the last couple of years including strip-till and no-till. And on those acres weed control is tougher to do than in conventional tillage. You're no longer wiping them out mechanically as a lot of people do." (February 2, 2010)

State Dollars For Water Quality Projects Approved

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), in cooperation with an interagency team that also includes the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, approved more than \$14 million in state grants for projects that will protect and restore Minnesota's streams, rivers, lakes and groundwater.

Competitive grant applications were submitted by cities, counties, soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts and watershed management organizations. The 20-member board approved the grants at its Jan. 28 regular meeting.

Funding for the grants includes \$2 million from the state's general fund and \$12 million from the Minnesota Clean Water Fund — one of four funds established through the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. Most of the funded projects also leverage local and federal dollars.

"These dollars are targeted for projects that will provide the greatest environmental outcomes," said John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director. "Local organizations will now be able to employ conservation practices that have proven to be effective in reducing nonpoint pollution."

Many of the projects will establish conservation practices to control stormwater runoff in urban and agricultural areas. Others will improve water quality by replacing problem septic systems, upgrading feedlots and by establishing native vegetation along shorelines in environmentally sensitive areas.

The complete list of funded projects is available on the BWSR Web site at www.bwsr.state.mn.us.

Paul Hawken Presentation

Author, environmentalist and entrepreneur Paul Hawken will speak about the environment and social justice on Thursday, Feb. 18, at Gustavus Adolphus College at 7:30 p.m. in Gustavus' Alumni Hall.

The speech, free and open to the public, is sponsored by the Gustavus Environmental Studies Program, the Johnson Center for Environmental Innovation, the Gustavus Lecture Series and the Center for Vocational Reflection.

During Hawken's visit to Minnesota, he will also speak at a fundraiser for the Minnesota Renewable Energy Society Feb. 19 in St. Paul. Those with more questions may contact James Dontje at jdontje@gustavus.edu.

Film Screening of Food, Inc.

Come out tonight (Feb 3rd) at 6:00 pm to the Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (170 Good Counsel Drive, Mankato) to see the film documentary Food, Inc. This is a must-see film about empowering everyone who eats. Contact: Lisa Coons, 507.389.4272 or lcoons@ssndmankato.org

CORN PLUS ETHANOL FACILITY TO PAY \$891,000 ENVIRONMENTAL PENALTY

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) today announced Corn Plus will pay a \$200,000 civil penalty and complete a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) costing no less than \$691,000 for a variety of alleged water-quality violations at the company's ethanol production facility in Winnebago.

Earlier in 2009, Corn Plus paid a penalty totaling \$150,000 to resolve a criminal water quality charge brought by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The violations, occurring from 2006 to 2008, were documented during MPCA staff inspections of the facility following complaints of odorous and discolored discharges to nearby surface waters, and after law enforcement personnel observed similar discharges. Eventually it was found that the wastewater discharges from a cooling tower at the facility had been illegally connected to a stormwater system that discharged to Rice Lake via a county ditch.

A significant portion of the violations alleged in the agreement relate to operating an unpermitted wastewater-disposal system; unpermitted discharge of wastewater that violated surface water-quality standards and caused nuisance conditions; failure to prevent the unpermitted discharges; and failure to report the unpermitted discharges and disposal system.

Under the SEP in the penalty agreement, the company will install a closed-loop heat-transfer system that will reduce overall water usage at the facility by 10 million gallons and reduce discharges to the Winnebago wastewater treatment facility by about 6 million gallons annually. The SEP also calls for the company to install more efficient lighting. The new lighting and heat transfer systems will also reduce energy consumption at the facility. The company agreed to spend a minimum of \$691,000 on the improvements and complete the SEP by September 2010.

SEPs are a common component of environmental penalties, and may include environmental improvements to the facility or other projects to benefit the environment. Projects must be approved by the MPCA.

In addition to the civil penalty and SEP, the company agreed to a compliance schedule for completing corrective actions, including specific plans on how it will ensure compliance with the facility's environmental permit limits and prevent reoccurrence of the violations in the future.

When calculating penalties, the MPCA takes into account how seriously the violations affected the environment, whether they were first-time or repeat violations, and how promptly they were reported to appropriate authorities. Penalties also attempt to recover the calculated economic benefit gained by failure to comply with environmental laws in a timely manner. For a comprehensive list of enforcement actions by the MPCA, go to the agency's Web site at www.pca.state.mn.us/newscenter/enforcement.html

Events:

February 18th (Thursday) is **Nutrients in Our Environment: Past, Present, and Beyond Conference** from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Verizon Civic Center in downtown Mankato. To register please call 651-201-6141. A \$10 registration fee includes lunch and refreshments. For additional information go to <http://www.upstreamheroes.org/nutmgmtconf.php>

February 20th (Saturday) is the **Clean Up the River Environment (CURE) Annual Meeting** starting at 6:00 p.m. at the Hollywood Theater in Montevideo. For more information <http://www.cureriver.org/events.html>

February 22nd (Monday) is the presentation **Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What to Do About it** by Robert Glennon, Professor of Law and Public Policy in the Rogers College of Law at the University of Arizona. Professor Glennon will share his insights on sustainability of our current water use. The evening will also feature a Minnesota panel of water resource experts. The event goes from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the University of Minnesota St. Paul Student Center Theater.

March 11th and 12th (Thursday and Friday) is the **Minnesota Erosion Control Association's Erosion Control and Stormwater Management Conference & Trade Show** at the Holiday Inn & Suites in St. Cloud. Network with stormwater and erosion control professionals from around the Midwest and learn about cutting edge projects, innovative designs and products. For more information: <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/mecaannuaconf.pdf>

Check out additional upcoming events and workshops on the Minnesota River Calendar at: <http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/calendar/index.html>

Water Quality Articles:

[PETA's annual Hormel proposal fails](#) (Rochester Post Bulletin). People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals unsuccessfully tried again to get a Hormel Foods Corp. stockholder proposal passed Tuesday night.

[Glass gardens back in style](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Terrariums had their heyday during the Age of Aquarius, then all but disappeared for a few decades. Now they're being rediscovered by a new eco-minded generation as a way to connect with nature.

[11 gubernatorial candidates make their pitches to large activist crowd](#) (MinnPost). Hundreds of people were on hand at the gubernatorial candidate forum at Macalester College to talk about their views on transportation, land use and the environment.

['Protect, enhance and restore' set for further review in Legislature](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). The battle over the wording of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment will continue when the 2010 Legislature opens next month.

[Report: '09 Legislature did right by amendment, voters](#) (Minnesota Conservation News). A fear of some who supported the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment was that lawmakers would substitute the proceeds from the sales tax increase for traditional sources of funds.

[Chris Niskanen: Mail-call mistake only feeds culture war over Outdoor Heritage Fund](#) (St. Paul Pioneer Press). The culture war between some Minnesota legislators and conservationists can make for interesting theater, especially when a personal letter goes astray.

[Commissioners to consider WMA land deal](#) (New Ulm Journal). The Brown County Board of Commissioners will consider a resolution Tuesday, Feb. 2 regarding a proposed land acquisition by the State of Minnesota from Pheasants Forever.

[So far, winter's effect minimal on deer](#) (Minnesota Conservation News). While some animals that live in the state's agricultural region might be struggling with the snow, those that live in the forest are enjoying what's shaping up to be a mild winter.

[Eagles on the St. Croix help track chemicals](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). In a warning to humans, eagles along the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway are showing scientists to what extent certain chemicals are polluting water, fish and small animals.

[Answer Man: Is global warming worth the worry?](#) (Rochester Post Bulletin). Dear Answer Man, is global warming something we still have to worry about? There hasn't been much in the news about it for a year!

[Disposing of old medicines can be tricky business](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). Researchers have long been finding residues from pharmaceuticals and personal care products in our lakes and rivers. Some of them are endocrine disruptors and can cause fish to develop both male and female characteristics.

[MPCA fines ethanol plant for wastewater violations](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). A southern Minnesota ethanol plant will pay a nearly \$900,000 penalty for wastewater violations.

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity . . . and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself. – William Blake

The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (Watershed Alliance) is an organized network of citizens, public agencies, and private organizations dedicated to communicating the benefits of an ecology healthy Minnesota River Watershed to others and are actively working towards its improvement and protection. We meet four times a year and encourage landowners and recreational users of the river to be part of the effort. For more information on the Watershed Alliance:

<http://www.watershedalliance.blogspot.com>

Thanks,

Scott

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