**AYC Ecology North**

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**Toxic Neglect**

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Facility 3, the so-called dredgings disposal facility for the Toledo Ship Channel in western Lake Erie’s Maumee Bay, has become the Great Lakes’ largest automatic flush toilet. The lack of monitoring at the facility remains scandalous. If local and state officials are unwilling to control this public health threat, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency should do the job for them.

Toledo hauls its sewage sludge to this man-made island in Oregon from the city’s Bay View Wastewater Treatment Plant in Point Place. S&L Fertilizer, the company the city contracts with to cart the contaminated sludge, makes a dirt-like product, Nu-Soil, from 10 parts sludge, two parts lime, and 88 parts silt that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers previously dumped on the island.

The city continues to dump thousands of tons of sewage sludge that is laced with contaminants at Facility 3. This mismanaged, poorly overseen disposal operation persists because it is cheap and convenient — and mostly out of the public’s sight and mind.

Whenever it rains — and it has done so a lot lately — the facility pours tens of thousands of gallons of water into the river and bay. This water becomes contaminated by E. coli, fecal coliform bacteria, and other pathogens, not to mention hospital and industrial waste.

Maumee Bay is the most fertile spawning grounds for the Great Lakes region’s $7-billion-a-year fishing industry. Thousands of jobs depend on the lake’s water quality. Because it is shallow, western Lake Erie is vulnerable — even under the best of circumstances — to the effects of oxygen-depleting algae that kill fish.

Even so, the pollution of western Lake Erie and the collateral damage to recreational boating, swimming, and fishing don’t seem to bother local and state officials. Nor does the worsening of western Lake Erie’s toxic algae problem.

Mayor Mike Bell, members of the Toledo City Council, and the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority continue to look the other way. So do Gov. John Kasich and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. No one wants to spend money to fix the leaky toilet.

Farmers who agree to allow the spreading of sludge on their land as fertilizer must follow strict protocols to ensure that it stays on the land and does not contaminate local creeks and ditches. By contrast, Facility 3, built to handle contaminated dredgings from the Maumee River and Maumee Bay shipping channels, seems to get a pass.

It would not cost much — maybe less than $100,000 — to determine the extent of the environmental damage. But given the budding bromance between Governor Kasich and Mayor Bell, there appears little hope for a transparent accounting of this potential public health threat.

Given the disregard of public health by state and local officials, it may be time to ask the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to conduct thorough, long-term monitoring of Facility 3.