

Environment & Energy

Hog Waste Permit Violates State Law, North Carolina Groups Say

By Zach Bright

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- State clean technology law violated, petition says
 - Pollutes nearby Black, Latino, Native American communities
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Fast-tracked permitting for hog waste-to-energy sites from North Carolina's top environmental agency is being challenged by the Southern Environmental Law Center in a legal filing.

A petition to initiate a case alleges that the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's general permit allowing hog farmers to spray hog waste on fields violates a state law requiring the state to mandate clean technologies.

That waste pollutes nearby air and waterways of disproportionately Black, Latino, and Native American communities, according to the filing on behalf of the Environmental Justice Community Action Network and Cape Fear River Watch.

"This permit will add to the already heavy burden that communities of color have borne for decades and continue a long-standing environmental injustice," Sherri White-Williamson, who co-founded the Environmental Justice Community Action Network, said in a statement.

The state environmental department was charged to develop the permitting system in the 2021 Farm Act. Community groups in eastern North Carolina objected to the permit, while the hog industry supported it.

The permit, issued in June, allows any of the state's more than 2,000 hog operations to install biogas equipment, store waste from the process in pits, and dispose of the waste by spraying, the petition says.

"The legislature—as they do—kind of did the hog industry's bidding and ignored community members who traveled from eastern North Carolina to Raleigh to make their to make the case about the harm of these projects," said Blakely Hildebrand, senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center. The petition was filed with the state Office of Administrative Hearings.

The North Carolina Pork Council didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

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