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## Overspray caused by Danish Flats evaporation device violates law, state oversight agency says

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The Danish Flats Environmental Services facility northeast of Moab violated state law while using an experimental device designed to increase the rate of evaporation on one of its pits, according to a notice of violation subsequently issued by the Utah Department of Natural

Resources' Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining.

A member of the Grand County Solid Waste Management Special Service District board of directors who was touring the facility in July raised concerns about the mist she observed rising from an area of the facility.

“I was north of the facility and observed some sort of airborne release from the direction of the new ponds area,” said Pam Hackley. “The plume did not behave as dust rising from a disturbance but had a more confined ‘cone’ that traveled low to the ground. The day was slightly breezy.”

The plume turned out to be “overspray” created by the device that Danish Flats was using to speed evaporation in evaporation pit 12, according to a notice of violation issued by the Utah Department of Natural Resources' Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining earlier this month.

Hackley's call to DOGM triggered an inspection that found not only the overspray but also detected fluids in the leak detection systems for three of the evaporation pits, according to the notice of violation.

The notice stated that in the “final approval to operate” granted to the facility by DOGM, “Overspray outside of the lined pit area is considered an illegal surface discharge, and could result in the closure of the facility.”

Facing this reality Danish Flats “elected to dismantle” the evaporation enhancement system, according to Clint Dworshak, DOGM compliance manager.

Zach Wasser, DFE Operations Manager did not return to telephone calls seeking comment for this story. But Wasser did respond with an email message

indicating that new and different enhancement systems developed in cooperation with the Utah State University Research Foundation would be tested at the site. Wasser's email did not address the leak issue.

"Danish Flats Environmental Services is continually looking for better, more environmentally sound ways to treat and evaporate waste water from oil and gas fields," Wasser said in the email response to questions about the issue. "We have a strategic partnership with Utah State University through their Development arm [Utah State University Research Foundation]. This partnership is constantly testing new and improved methods to evaporate water, scrub air emissions and reduce total pollutants. We are in the process of refining those methods and always attempt to comply with regulatory agency requests."

Grand County Engineer Mark Wright was on vacation when Hackley notified DOGM and attempted to notify him of the plume she discovered. A county ordinance charges Wright with responsibility for monitoring Danish Flats and enforcing stipulations set forth in the ordinance.

"Up to this point they've run the facility very well," Dworshak said. Asked about the frequency of inspections performed by his division, he said, "Our inspector will be more alert in the future with Danish Flats, possibly do some additional inspections in the next few months. We have the right to come on [the property] at any time... We try to keep them off balance."

Dworshak said the division does not receive many calls or complaints, but it responds to all of them.

"I think it is an awareness for [Danish Flats]. They have to realize the neighborhood they're in," Dworshak said.

Hackley said she was visiting the Danish Flats facility on behalf of the solid waste board to learn how the company intends to dispose of the solid waste left behind after the water evaporates. She said her understanding is that solid waste will be shipped to the East Carbon landfill.

"What I saw was just Joe Citizen happening to be at the right place at the right time," Hackley said.

Dworshak said that no permit from DOGM is required for Danish Flats to conduct future tests of different evaporation enhancement systems. But prior approval from the county engineer Wright is required by county ordinance, according to Wright.

Wright noted that this is not just a local problem. Drilling for natural gas is expanding rapidly all over the world because new techniques developed in the Western U.S. have greatly expanded the ability to extract gas from shale formations. Consequently huge amounts of "produced water" must be safely

disposed.

Produced water comes out of the wells along with the natural gas. It consists of ground water, water that is suspended in the gas, plus water injected into the wells at high pressure to fracture the rock separating gas deposits from each other, Wright said.

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