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1012 Highland Woods  
Chapel Hill, NC 27517  
February 1, 2004

Mr. Ed Kerwin  
Executive Director  
OWASA

Dear Mr. Kerwin:

Thank you for sending me the recent Status Report on odor abatement. Because I will be unable to attend the February 12th meeting, I am sending a few comments in this letter.

On a first reading of the status report, I felt encouraged, but on a second, closer, reading I lost much of that feeling.

Here is a summary of what I take from the report:

Actions Taken, 1994 - 2002

A. In collection system

1994 -- hydrogen peroxide added

2000-02 -- improvements at Rogerson Pump station

2002 -- biofilter on Hamilton Road

B. At Mason Farm Plant. NO actions at all! [This despite an unacceptable level of odor emission during all these years. And many promises made.]

Actions Taken, March 2003 -- present

A. In collection system: None

B. At Mason Farm Plant. In March 2003 a project was begun to install covers over biosolids tanks and a scrubber.

- tank covers completed October 2003

- scrubber to be completed February 2004

Plans for future at Mason Farm Plant

- replacing digester covers. [to begin Spring 2004. 18 mos to complete]

- improvement in the biological treatment process

- addition of a foam removal system

- new pumping station with special odor control features

Comment: OWASA's past record of odor control from the Mason Farm plant has been extremely poor. No new measures were taken from 1994 to 2002, and not much attention was paid in the preceding decades. But that is water over the dam. We must now look to the future, though that past experience does influence our reactions to present promises.

I note that action to cover the aeration basins is specifically rejected because of its cost, and because they "are not considered to be a source of off-site odors." I am of course unable to judge that statement, but I would like to know what is the total cost of the entire projected expansion and improvement of the Mason Farm plant.

In its conclusion, the Status Report states that "OWASA is committed to minimizing odors..." and that the measures proposed "will substantially improve conditions..." These statements are encouraging but distressingly vague. To really *minimize* off-site odors means to reduce them to zero.

A final word about complaints from the public. The report states that only 25 complaints were made in 2003, down from 67 in 2002. I suggest that this is a highly misleading indicator of the level of the problem. A useful analogy can be made to unemployment statistics. When unemployed persons give up looking for a job, the official statistic of unemployed persons declines because the BLS doesn't count people who have given up. I myself have rarely called in to complain, perhaps twice in the last year. I could have called once a week for the past twenty years, or 1,000 times, but it would be silly and pointless to do so. Would it really have made a difference if I and my neighbors had logged in several hundred calls in 2003?

It appears that offsite odor can be eliminated. I wish you all success in achieving that goal.

Sincerely yours,



James C. Ingram