Morrell Meat Processing Plant Pollution Controls to Be Evaluated

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — State officials are optimistic that an inspection later this month will show that upgrades and conservation measures are helping fix water quality issues at the John Morrell & Co. meat processing plant in Sioux Falls.

The plant has spent $10 million on upgrades after being cited for numerous wastewater violations in recent years caused by pump failures, broken equipment and leaking pipes, the Argus Leader [1] newspaper reported.

South Dakota's Department of Environment and Natural Resources cited the company in 2011 for dozens of wastewater violations that dated back three years. Morrell paid the state $44,000 as part of a settlement and agreed to fix its wastewater treatment system. At the same time, the company settled a federal case by paying a $206,000 penalty under the Clean Water Act for the way it handled toxic chemicals in its refrigeration system.

Morrell has created more storage for its own wastewater treatment system and as of July, it was no longer sending waste to the city's wastewater treatment facility. Among the improvements at the plant is a 6.5 million gallon lagoon that has waste-eating bacteria.

Kelli Buscher, administrator of the surface water quality program for the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said she expects the improvements will mean more consistent treatment and an end to violations.

Buscher visited the plant last week while in Sioux Falls for a water conference and said she was pleased with the improvements. Department officials will make a formal visit later this month.

The Sioux Falls plant is the largest of Morrell's 18 facilities, processing 4.7 million pigs each year into 246 million pounds of packaged meat. In the past five years, the plant has reduced its water use by 15 percent, cut solid waste by 27 percent and reduced greenhouse gas emissions 19 percent. The company also says it is working to use less energy and reduce the amount of packaging it uses to wrap and ship its products.

"This facility has been around more than 100 years, and we're still making dramatic strides in the last five years," said John Meyer, director of environmental affairs and sustainability for the John Morrell Food Group.

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