Chadbourn site uses methyl bromide

By Allen Turner
alenturner@lcolumbus.com

While much attention in Columbus County has been focused on a pending methyl bromide air quality permit application by Malec Brothers Transportation near Riegelwood, a smaller already-permitted operation using methyl bromide is in business near Chadbourn.

Lighthouse Commodity Group, LLC, a Delaware-based corporation, has a permit from the state to emit 10 tons of methyl bromide annually, compared to the 140 tons annually for which Malec Brothers is seeking to obtain a permit.

County commissioner Buddy Byrd and a partner lease land to the company, but Byrd says he has no ties otherwise to the operation.

Although Lighthouse Commodity Group is operating on property near the intersection of Gris and Braswell roads just west of Chadbourn that is owned by Byrd and a partner, Rufus Young, Byrd says that he has no knowledge of exactly what type of operations Lighthouse is conducting on the property.

"You'll need to talk to them to get the details," Byrd said. "The only thing I know about them is that they're paying their rent every month."

Telephone calls and emails...
messages to Roger Richardson Jr., managing partner at Lighthouse, were not returned. Sealand containers similar to the ones Malec would use were on the site Wednesday morning.

N.C. Division of Air Quality (DAQ) issued a permit on June 30, 2017, allowing Lighthouse — operating under the name of Royal Pest Solutions Inc. — to use a fumigation process utilizing methyl bromide on import/export commodities shipping containers to emit up to 10 tons of methyl bromide into the air in any consecutive 12-month period.

That contrasts with the 140 tons of methyl bromide that Malec Brothers is seeking approval for near Delco.

DAQ spokesperson Sharon Martin confirmed Tuesday that no decision has been reached by the state on the Malec Brothers permit application. She could not predict a timeframe for such a decision.

DAQ conducted two contentious hearings in May, hearings in which hundreds of area residents showed up to demonstrate their displeasure with the proposed permit.

Pine logs are offloaded before being loaded onto shipping containers and fumigated with methyl bromide at the Lighthouse Commodity Group operation near the intersection of Grist and Braswell roads just west of Chadbourn.

David Smith of Malec Brothers said the company is looking at the feasibility of implementing capture technology that would mitigate the methyl bromide release.

Another DAQ spokesperson, Megan Thorpe, said after the commissioners' action that their resolution would be considered by the state as DAQ officials consider the Malec Brothers' permit application.

One concern of residents who live near the Malec Brothers site is the effect of the methyl bromide plume when it is released after logs have been treated.

The News Reporter had hoped to ask Richardson if, even though the permitted amount of methyl bromide at the Grist site is significantly less than what Malec Brothers is requesting, his operation has a similar plume release when logs are treated there.
Change the law: no methyl bromide

For more than 35 years, our family has subscribed to and enjoyed reading The News Reporter. I have never written a letter to the editor, but now am compelled to do so.

As a retired nurse who has cared for many patients with lung and respiratory illnesses and after reading Kim Smith's comments in this week's "Columbus Extra," I am compelled to write to you and all of eastern Columbus County.

The log treatment plant in the old Acme community of Riegelwood and now called "Delco" (probably its mailing address) is ¾ air miles from my house. The people of our community and adjoining areas are very concerned about this company asking for a permit, which can use up to 140 tons of methyl bromide each year. This is a very toxic, colorless, odorless gas that can cause permanent lung and brain damage and even death and birth defects.

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke by phone with John Allran, environmental toxicologist with the N.C. State Pesticide and Toxic Management office. He told me that the permit Malec Brothers has sought is not illegal and that the only way to stop it is to get the law changed.

He told me they are proposing 12-15 pounds of methyl bromide per 1,000 cubic foot for duration of 48-72 hours. When the containers are opened, they ventilate with no more than five parts per million dispersed into the air and should be contained in 1/4 of a mile, "Which should be ok."

To my neighbors and me, this is like gambling with our lives and our children's lives. At the May 15 meeting at Acme-Delco Middle School, a physician spoke who said the contamination readings should be measured in "billions" not "millions." He has spoken with epidemiologists who have treated children and adults exposed to methyl bromide. He also suggested to the DAQ officials that they would do well to consult with some epidemiologists about this when setting their limits on regulations.

The "billions" would be 100 times less than "millions."

People of eastern Columbus County, call or write to our legislators to change this law. It takes a long time to get laws changed, but we must try. If the Malec Brothers would use de-barking techniques or steam kiln techniques, which can be measured and better controlled, they would be much safer. This could keep this job producing company operating safely.


Mary Kate Knowles
Riegelwood
Health director calls proposed environmental rule ‘a win-win’

By Diana Matthews
dianamathews@ncgouls.com

Columbus County Health Department Director Kim Smith was thoroughly pleased when she received word that the state Division of Air Quality was going to increase regulation of timber processors using methyl bromide gas to treat logs for export.

“I personally think it’s a win-win for the state of North Carolina and for our county,” Smith said. “I think it’s wonderful that they’re taking it seriously, as they should.”

The DAQ announced intentions in July to make all timber fumigators install relatively new “capture and control technology” that will remove 90 percent or more of the pesticide before it enters the atmosphere.

North Carolina has five timber processors using methyl bromide and one that recently stopped doing so. Three small operations and one much larger had pending permits when DAQ director Michael Abrazinskas announced the new rule. The plants now in operation are limited to emitting 10 tons of methyl bromide per year apiece under “Synthetic Minor” permits, and five of the eight small plants belong to one Delaware company, Royal Pest Solutions.

The new rule came about because of vocal public opposition to the proposed opening of a larger-scale timber processing yard near Delco by Malec Brothers Transport. The Australian-owned company was setting up to fumigate logs in sealed shipping containers, then vent the containers before sending them to the state port in Wilmington.

Residents of Columbus, Brunswick and New Hanover counties turned out by the hundreds for two lengthy and emotional meetings. The DAQ again postponed its decision several weeks beyond the predicted 30-day period.

Abrazinskas’ letter put Malec Brothers’ application on hold indefinitely until they provide additional proof of their “plan for capture and control technology and operation limits to safeguard public health.”

David Smith, Malec Brothers’ executive for international procurement, has said since May that his company will be happy to install capture technology as soon as it is available and feasible. He has complained, however, that the DAQ does not know what pollutants are currently in the air over eastern Columbus County, and that the new rule applies only to timber exporters, not to produce importers, who also use methyl bromide.

“The folks in Riegelwood and Delco were very instrumental in getting the state to push back from the table and look at the big picture,” said the health department’s Smith. “Those individuals and groups have done a great job. I have to hand it to them.”

Smith said that slowing down is a wise approach “when you don’t really know what a chemical will do, and we’re not 100 percent sure about the long-term effects of methyl bromide.”