



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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City Manager's Statement

AMES, Iowa – The City of Ames, in collaboration with the National Animal Disease Center (NADC), held a press conference Thursday May 11 at Ames City Hall. During the event, City Manager Steve Schainker read the following prepared statement:

One week ago, two employees of the National Animal Disease Center (NADC) approached City of Ames Water and Pollution Control Department officials making the following claims regarding protein substances called **prions**:

First, that the NADC is utilizing operating procedures for destroying, or what is known as deactivating, prions that are different from the procedures being used by the adjacent National Veterinary Services Laboratories;

Second, that the NADC's procedures are less restrictive than those recommended by agencies such as the US Health and Human Services Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Institutes for Health (NIH);

Third, that the NADC failed to follow its own internal standard operating procedures for destroying prions before these proteins are released into the City's sanitary sewer system; and

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Fourth, that the NADC failed to provide its employees with the proper standard operating procedures, thus placing its employees and the environment at risk.

These claims are significant to the City of Ames because our Water Pollution Control Plant is the recipient of the majority of the wastewater from the NADC. Our system is not designed to detect or treat many of the more exotic organisms handled at this facility. Any prion that enters our plant will pass through untreated into the environment. Therefore, we rely on the NADC to adequately pretreat its wastewater, including the destruction of prions, before they are discharged into our sewer system.

Prions are not living organisms like bacteria or viruses. They are natural proteins that exist in all of us. However, when this protein is folded in an abnormal manner, it can cause potentially lethal diseases in animals and humans. Therefore, ensuring that abnormal prions are effectively destroyed prior to their release into our sewer system, and ultimately into the environment, is critical.

After receiving this information, City staff immediately convened a meeting with NADC officials which included the Acting Director, the Acting Deputy Director, and the Research Leader for Prion Diseases. At this meeting on May 8, 2006, the NADC representatives confirmed that they are currently conducting research with prion diseases in animals, specifically Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in elk, and Scrapies in sheep. In addition, they informed us that testing for Mad Cow Disease (BSE) will be conducted in the future at this facility. The NADC officials assured us that the procedures they were using to destroy prions before they are released into the City's sewer system are consistent with practices recommended in current scientific literature. At this meeting, they also assured us there are no current, documented research findings that indicate that CWD or Scrapie prions can be transmitted to humans. I want to emphasize that USDA officials have informed us in subsequent discussions that BSE research will not begin at NADC until the concerns regarding the proper methodology for destroying prions have been addressed.

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As you might imagine, this issue is very complex and involves expertise beyond the capability of City staff to resolve. The City of Ames and the NADC agree that because this matter involves important issues of health and safety, our citizens and employees must be assured that these concerns are taken seriously, assessed quickly, and addressed immediately as appropriate. Therefore, the staffs of both the NADC and the City of Ames are initiating an independent review of the allegations. City staff is currently working with the USDA to assemble a team whom we hope will be composed of experts from the Centers For Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency, and possibly additional experts.

The independent review team will be asked to accomplish at least four tasks:

- Identify scientifically accepted methods for effectively destroying prions.
- Assess the concerns raised regarding NADC's current and past methods for the destruction of prions.
- Determine the risk posed to humans and the environment, from the current, as well as previous, methods for the destruction of prions.
- Finally, if remediation is needed, the independent review team will be asked to provide advice on what corrective actions should be taken.

While the NADC management team has assured City staff that there are no known, documented health risks associated with their current and past practices of deactivating prions, it is our collective belief that an open and thorough review of NADC's practices by a group of independent experts is the best course of action to address the health concerns that have been raised by these claims.

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