

Statement by
Dr. Caird Rexroad, Associate Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service
May 11, 2006

“I want to thank the City of Ames for the opportunity to join them to address concerns about the way we dispose of waste materials at the Agricultural Research Service’s National Animal Disease Center (NADC) in Ames, Iowa. We believe our science-based procedures protect the public and the environment.

“We conduct research at NADC on Chronic Wasting Disease – or CWD - and Scrapie. Our research helps us understand these diseases so we can work toward eliminating them. It is important to note that CWD is present in the wild among deer and elk populations and those animals naturally pass it into the environment. Furthermore, neither of these diseases has been found to be transmissible to people.

“The concerns raised claim that waste materials associated with this research go down a drain untreated into the municipal wastewater system. Nothing could be further from the truth. All solid waste related to this research, including animal carcasses and tissues, are and have always been incinerated. The liquid waste from the animals, such as the feces and urine, goes down a drain directly to a pre-treatment tank. In fact, the plumbing is designed in such a way to ensure no liquid waste can leave this facility without going through the pre-treatment process.

“NADC’s pre-treatment tank utilizes a specific heat treatment for liquid and fecal waste, which scientific research tells us effectively deactivates the prions. This includes heating the liquid waste to a temperature of 250 degrees Fahrenheit for 30 minutes. Scientific research indicates that the heat treatment process used by NADC is 99.9999 percent effective in deactivating the prions. In fact, the scientific research indicates that rate is achieved after just one minute of heating at 250 degrees. We apply the heat treatment for thirty times that long. Our pre-treatment process is closely monitored to ensure that the equipment is functioning properly and our protocols are followed.

“We welcome scientific review of our system to confirm it is safe and effective. We want to make sure the city and all of our neighbors share our confidence in the safety of our system. We take these concerns very seriously and are offering our full cooperation to the USDA Inspector General’s Office, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency.

“In addition, we are working with the City of Ames to identify a team of outside experts who will be invited to review our protocols for waste handling and disposal. We want there to be absolutely no question about the fact that safety is our top priority.”

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