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House bill requires incineration for sludge

A Cabarrus County legislator wants to give his county a defense against Charlotte's sewage sludge, which some of his constituents have rallied against in recent months.

Rep. Larry Pittman, a Concord Republican, is among the primary sponsors of the bill filed Tuesday. **The bill lets counties that incinerate sludge -- that would be Cabarrus -- require that sludge be burned before it's spread as fertilizer on farm fields.**

Counties without incinerators could force an "alternate method" of sludge treatment to reduce disease-carrying pathogens and rodents.

Charlotte Water's opponents in the Rowan-Cabarrus community of Gold Hill say they're more worried about heavy metals and toxic chemicals tainting soil and groundwater.

The utility this month withdrew an application to expand its sludge fields by 1,300 acres in Cabarrus, Rowan and Iredell counties. But its existing North Carolina permit expires March 31 and will have to be renewed, so could apparently be affected by the sludge bill.

Charlotte Water canceled the request after the state cited a Rowan County property that would have been included in the expansion for environmental violations.

Cabarrus County, meanwhile, cranked up a new, \$20 million power plant fueled by sludge last October. The county landfills the ash that's left.

Cabarrus says it would welcome Charlotte's sludge, but the city has said incineration is not a viable alternative for economic and other reasons.

Pittman's Republican cosponsors are Rep. Carl Ford of Rowan County and Rep. Michael Speciale of Craven County. The bill now goes to the House Local Government committee, which Ford co-chairs, and if endorsed there to the Environment committee.