

'A REAL MESS' Flooding sends pollution gushing

From staff and wire reports

Alarmed environmental officials surveyed flooded livestock operations and municipal plants Saturday and Sunday and saw an environmental disaster taking shape in eastern North Carolina.

"It was a very sobering trip," Don Reuter, spokesman for the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said after Saturday's aerial survey.

He said officials saw farms everywhere that were flooded or surrounded by water.

Up and down the coastal plain's rivers and creeks were flooded animal operations, wastewater treatment plants and junkyards, said Mr. Reuter.

"We've got a real mess on our hands," he said.

A stew of sewage, urban runoff, farm chemicals, silt and debris is surging down swollen rivers in the wake of Hurricane Floyd. State environmental officials said at least seven hog lagoons have flooded and one has ruptured, and 20 local government and more than 200 swine farmers have reported problems.

"Farms are just being overwhelmed; wastewater treatment plants are being washed out and flooded," said Ernie Seneca, a spokesman for the state Division of Water Quality.

In addition, an outbreak of mosquitoes and mold is feared once the waters recede.

After Sunday's survey, the Natural Resources Department said many oil slicks were seen around flooded vehicles and homes in the region that covers Brunswick, Columbus, Bladen, and Duplin counties. Several dozen flooded hog and chicken farms were spotted from the air in Duplin County, according to a news release from the department. Numerous waste lagoons appeared close to overflowing.

People with flooded wells in eastern North Carolina have been ordered to boil their water to kill any disease-causing bacteria that might have seeped in, said Linda Sewall, director of the state Division of Environmental Health.

"Many wells are improperly constructed. If they're flooded, almost

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Staff photo: JEFFREY S. G.

A rainbow sheen covers the water as fuel spills from cars parked at a flooded garage near Wallace in Duplin County. State officials are trying to assess the environmental damage being caused by Hurricane Floyd's flooding in eastern North Carolina, where farm and city waste systems have been overwhelmed.

Pollute

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assuredly contaminated water is getting down in those wells, which means it's getting into the groundwater," Ms. Sewall said. "That could be a long-term problem."

The problem was more widespread elsewhere. Massive flooding in Edgecombe and Pitt counties

tainted all the water supplies there, Renee Hoffman, a state public safety spokeswoman, said Saturday.

Ms. Sewall also said she is concerned about the mold that grows in soaked carpets and furniture, which can cause serious respiratory problems when people inhale spores. Her agency also is drawing up a plan for massive spraying to control the expected horde of mosquitoes within the next few weeks.

While hog growers tried to lower

lagoon levels before the storm, "no one could have anticipated the levels of rain that fell in such a short period of time," Deborah Johnson, president of the N.C. Pork Council, said in a statement.

The flooding also took a toll on municipal water and wastewater systems. Untreated sewage spilled into streams and rivers in Cary, Smithfield, Hillsborough, Wake Forest, Zebulon, Kenly, Goldsboro, Jacksonville and many other towns.

Wastewater treatment plants in Kinston, Kenly, Wilson, Smithfield and Pine Tops were shut down at

various times. Tarboro's sewer collection system was overwhelmed. In Wayne County, 200 feet of sewer line washed out, Mr. Seneca said.

Just north of Wilmington, water blew out a 70-foot section of a railroad bed and flooded two old quarries used as lagoons for industrial wastewater from Occidental Chemical, a chromium chemicals factory.

An unknown amount of the waste water washed into the Northeast Cape Fear River.

Occidental Plant manager Gene Renzaglia said tests of the river water so far show no serious damage.