

When it comes to gun violence, prevention is the key

DAVID E. CORBIN, PH.D

The tragedy in Uvalde and other mass killings in U.S. schools have prompted lots of questionable solutions, such as having only one door with armed guards. Aside from fire code violations, such “remedies” should remind us that schools are more than buildings.

As a former elementary school physical education teacher in Puerto Rico and Texas, a great majority of my classes were outside. As a high school biology teacher in Mary-

land, we would go on field trips or engage in outdoor activities. Student evaluations revealed that these were foremost in the students’ memories of their best learning experiences.

In public health, we tell the story of a community that keeps finding people in the river who need to be rescued. This keeps happening. Finally, someone asks, “How is it that so many people end up in the river in need of rescuing?” “Let’s look upstream,” says one person.

So, they go upstream and

find that there are treacherous rapids that hurl boaters into the water and many are not prepared because there is no warning sign, they are not properly trained to navigate the rapids, they don’t have life jackets or they don’t know how to swim.

In essence, there are multiple causes and multiple solutions. Living in Omaha for the past 40-plus years, this is a particularly apt analogy because the word Omaha (Umo ho) is translated as “upstream people.”

In this metaphorical river,

what are some possible solutions? Certainly, safety training and knowledge of the river should be a logical starting point. Access is another aspect. Untrained people should not enter the river upstream from the rapids. If you do wish to run the rapids, then take the time to learn how to safely navigate.

But we are drowning. Other countries have more successfully navigated the killer rivers while we keep believing that the freedom to carry a gun supersedes the freedom to safely attend school. The new refrain

seems to be guns don’t kill children, school buildings do.

We must realize that schools are more than buildings just as rivers are more than water. The answers to the problems of gun violence are upstream. Prevention is the key.

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Permit

From A3

clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam — neonicotinoid pesticides commonly used in seed treatments.

The permit also prohibits releasing wastewater to what the state refers to as “Outfall 001,” a waterway running south and east away from the plant through land owned by the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska National Guard and several private properties before eventually flowing into Clear Creek.

The tributary stream has been a focus of research efforts attempting to learn how far neonicotinoid pesticides, which are toxic to bees and other pollinators, have moved away from the site.

Earlier this year, the AltEn Facility Response Group identified roughly 320 acres of ground to land-apply treated wastewater held in containment



JUSTIN WAN, JOURNAL STAR FILE PHOTO

People attend a public hearing in Mead on renewing AltEn’s waste water treatment permit in April.

ponds at the site.

A little more than 9 million gallons has been applied to date, according to the state environmental department, and earlier this week, AltEn was given approval to continue treating and land-applying wastewater to approved properties through a pilot program.

If AltEn or the Facility Response Group receives permission to land-apply

wastewater on any other sites, they will first need to obtain approval from the state.

“Each site must be approved by the department individually and must be based on the ground water and best management practices of the individual properties of the site,” the permit states.

The decision to reissue the permit comes after the proposal received op-

position from residents of Mead and the surrounding area at a town hall meeting at the Mead High School gym in April.

At that meeting, residents said the state should deny AltEn’s request for a new permit because of its long history of noncompliance with state and federal environmental rules, or that the permit should be granted to the Facility Response Group, which has effective control of the site.

In a response filed on its public document portal Thursday, NDEE said it “took into account compliance and noncompliance since the 2017 permit issuance” and strengthened the language in the permit.

“The requirements of the permit were written to be protective of land application sites and waters of the state,” NDEE said in its response. “If site conditions change, NDEE may modify or update the NPDES permit.”

Others questioned if AltEn has the financial resources necessary to comply with the permit — something NDEE said is not part of the permit’s requirements.

“Consideration of the financial resources of the permittee is not required before issuing, modifying, or denying a NPDES permit,” NDEE said. “AltEn, LLC, is subject to the requirements of the permit.”

The Department of Environment and Energy said it could also alter the term or conditions of the permit depending on the progress of cleanup or other factors.

Davis said approving the permit was “not good governance by any stretch of the imagination. It appears the agency whose task it is to protect Nebraska’s environment and the health and well-being of citizens is failing its mission.”

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