In mayor race: ‘Let police be police’

‘Not on my watch,’ Lightfoot says of opponents’ campaign refrain

By Alice Yin and Gregory Pratt | Chicago Tribune

It wasn’t until after his death in 1973 that his works, containing thousands of acres of northeast Illinois farmland with toxic forever chemicals, a reclusive artist’s works were discovered, shortly before his death in 1973.

TRIBUNE INVESTIGATION

By Michael Hawthorne | Chicago Tribune

Sewage spread as fertilizer on Chicago-area farmland contains toxic chemicals

By the Chicago Tribune

SUSPECT SLUDGE

The maven of mystery

At 75, Sara Paretsky, the pioneering Chicago crime writer has changed — but she's not going to stop writing books featuring V.I. Warshawski.

Summer of COVID caution

As we navigate another season in a seemingly never-ending pandemic, public health advocates are increasingly concerned because some PFAS build up in human blood, take years to leave the body and don’t break down in the environment. Others transform over time into more harmful compounds.

SUNDAY SAVINGS: $179 IN COUPONS INSIDE

Winner of the 2022 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting
concentrations of certain PFAS can be detected in the soil near cancer, birth defects, liver damage, respiratory illnesses, neurological disorders, high cholesterol and obesity, studies have found. Links to breast cancer and other diseases exist but have not been shown in soil samples. The EPA has designated two levels of PFAS as standards.

“Everybody wants to pretend it isn’t happening,” said David Wallop, a physician and senior food, drug and agriculture officer at the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council.

Crops and livestock

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is one of two independent, taxpayer-financed agencies that manages sewage from Chicago and the region’s Cook County suburbs. For more than a decade that its sludge is contaminated with PFAS and other chemicals, according to studies reviewed by the agency’s internal watchdog.

In 2016, the EPA released a study that found high levels of PFAS in agricultural products, including human and animal food. The study’s author of both MWRD sludge studies, said last year during the hearing that the EPA had yet to determine a safe level of PFAS in drinking water. The EPA has no reason to believe that its sludge meets current federal standards, the email said.

The paramount challenge is how to deal with the negative public perception about land application of household containing PFAS. Brian Perkovich, the MWRD’s executive director, wrote in 2016, “there is uncertainty in the science.”

In April, Maine Gov. Janet T. Mills signed bipartisan legislation banning the spread of sewage sludge containing PFAS from being shipped to other states. The state law requires the EPA to perform the tests and, if the sludge is determined to be contaminated, the state must require sludge from other states that it accepts to be...
FOREVER CHEMICALS

Chicago Tribune  |  Section 1  |  Sunday, July 31, 2022

Madaric view shows the Stickney Water Reclamation Plant, operated by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, on April 12 in Cicero. The MWRD has found that MSPO levels at some sites require the district to control them as hazardous waste.

**Chasing a ghost**

During the past six years, Illinois ranked second among the states for the amount of sludge dumped on farmland, according to federal records. Only California, which ranks highest, dumped 37.3 million tons to farmland, topped the 31.1 million tons moved in Illinois.

The Illinois EPA told the Chicago Tribune that to determine if the practices endan-


er the state’s residents. By

drilling a new irrigation well and

to drill a new irrigation well and

**A national solution**

The MWRD once dumped most of its sludge in farmlands on Chicago’s South Side. Today, its waste is mostly shipped to the Metropolitan Waste Recycling District in suburban Will County, which processes it for use as biosolids.

The MWRD’s strategy in the late 1990s was to convince farmers to take sludge as a free byproduct. But the district quickly realized that farmers didn’t want to use the sludge because of its high levels of PFAS, a chemical that can build up in the food chain and make it difficult to get to the necessary levels of PFAS.

However, the MWRD found that some farmers were interested in using the sludge as a fertilizer, so it began to charge farmers for the sludge. The district now charges $100 per ton for sludge, which is roughly the cost of treatment.

**Still out there?**

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Researchers urge doctors to test patients for PFAS

Chemicals could cause cancer

By Michael Hawthorne

Physicians should test millions of Americans for toxic forever chemicals, doctors advocated Thursday, saying that exposure to the chemicals could cause cancer and other health problems.

The advocates called for the national health care system to encourage doctors to test patients for PFAS — a family of chemicals linked to cancer and other problems — and to alert patients to the dangers of the chemicals.

"Doctors are in a unique position to help patients avoid exposure to these chemicals," said Dr. Leo Termeer, a senior scientist at the Environmental Working Group, a non-profit research organization that has advocated for federal regulations to reduce exposure to PFAS.

The advocates said that exposure to PFAS could lead to cancer, liver disease, kidney disease, birth defects and other problems.

"PFAS are everywhere and they are easily absorbed in the body," said Termeer. "It is time for doctors to take a leadership role in testing patients for PFAS."