



(Courtesy Living Rivers) Danish Flats Environmental Services operates Utah's largest pond farm, pictured here near Cisco, for handling produced water from oil and gas wells. After years of claiming the ponds' emissions were "de minimis," the company belatedly acknowledged this complex of five-acre ponds and tanks is a major source of hazardous air pollutants and volatile organic compounds. Utah regulators this month issued an air-quality permit for the facility this month after near six years of operation.

Editorial: Utah should never take a polluter's word

Utah must crack down on polluters.

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What's bad is that the operators of an oil and gas wastewater facility in Grand County kept telling the state of Utah (<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/58298470-78/danish-flats-ponds-company.html.csp>) that it was producing no measurable amounts of air pollution.

What's much worse is that the state, specifically the Utah Division of Air Quality, took the operators' word for it.

What's flat unforgivable is that, once it was determined that the folks in charge of the Danish Flats Environmental Services facility were not telling the truth, they received not only a wrist-slapping fine of \$50,000, but also a state permit to continue operating.

If Utah is going to pursue its full potential as a fossil-fuel producing state — and, under the administration of Republican Gov. Gary Herbert and anyone likely to succeed him, it will — we are going to have to get one thing straight:

Never, ever, take a polluter's word for anything.

Republican icon Ronald Reagan said, "Trust, but verify (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust,_but_verify)."
Republicans who rule in Utah should, when dealing with pollution-heavy industries, boil that down to simply, "Verify." There is absolutely no room for trust.

It requires a towering level of naïveté for anyone, particularly an elected official or high-level bureaucrat, to assume for a single moment that oil companies, environmental remediators, power plants and the like will ever see any percentage in leveling with state regulators about what they are doing unless they are sure that their claims are being tested by independent measuring and analysis.

Yet, incredibly, DAQ officials considered the operators of the 14-pond facility near Cisco credible when they declared their own air pollution as "de minimis," the legal term to too small to be of any interest. After six years of that, the state actually checked out what was going on and determined that the Danish Flats facility was actually producing as much as hundreds of tons of airborne pollutants every year.

The company had been using equipment and methods of measurements that were designed for other uses under other circumstances. So the results they provided to the state were misleading, not only to the state but, apparently, even to the company running the facility.

Another state agency, the Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining, had been relatively more proactive in monitoring the facility, at one point shutting down a misting operation that filled the air with sickening chemicals. Grand County has also implemented new safeguards.

Utah officials like to brag about how they run "the best managed state." But until it gets more active about managing the state's fossil fuel industry, that tag will be unearned.