

On April 18, 2008, Chairman Edolphus Towns wrote to HUD, USDA, and EPA regarding federally-funded experiments that tested fertilizer made from human and industrial wastes in poor, black neighborhoods in Baltimore and East St. Louis.

According to an Associated Press article, the experiment was intended to test whether sewage sludge protected children from lead poisoning in the soil. "Nine low-income families in Baltimore row houses agreed to let researchers till the sewage sludge into their yards and plant new grass. In exchange, they were given food coupons as well as the free lawns," the story said. However, "families were assured the sludge was safe and were never told about any harmful ingredients," and "there is no evidence there was ever any medical follow-up."

Rep. Towns said, "If the facts in this report are accurate, these studies are an appalling abuse of government authority reminiscent of other experiments on minorities that have been condemned by history."

Rep. Elijah Cummings, who represents the Baltimore area, and Rep. Wm. Lacy Clay, who represents the St. Louis area, joined Chairman Towns in requesting documents from the agencies involved.