

A response by the state department cites, among other things, a lack of funding to enforce some requirements.

By **JASON CLAYWORTH**
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Iowa's Department of Natural Resources has not complied with 16 state laws dealing with issues

such as treatment of infectious waste, an audit released Monday shows.

An environmental activist called the findings alarming because laws such as one requiring creation of a toxic pollution prevention program were enacted to protect the public. The agency's failure to uphold state law jeopardizes the well-being of Iowans and represents a serious disconnect between lawmakers and agency leaders responsible for enforcement, the activist said.

Some of the laws have been on the books for nearly 20 years. Two lawmakers — one Democrat and one Republican — called for Gov. Chet Culver to hold officials at the Department of Natural Resources accountable and to launch a major overhaul of its leadership.

"If in fact we've got state departments that are not complying with the law, that's illegal," said Sen. Dennis Black, D-Grinnell and vice chairman of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee. "If it's illegal, then

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TRAPPED Hazards of Aging Mobile Homes
A Des Moines Register Special Report

Park residents sound off on hazards, fees, evictions



ANDREA MELENDEZ/THE REGISTER

Reports spur consideration of legislative responses

By **LEE ROOD**
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Residents of private mobile home parks and their neighbors in 15 cities complained about unsafe conditions, unfair fees, abrupt evictions and other problems at the parks in the wake of a Des Moines Register report last week.

The complaints poured in after an investigation into Regency of Iowa, owner of several mobile home parks in the state. Residents of Regency parks and local officials

accuse the company of predatory and illegal sales of mobile homes. The investigation prompted the Johnson County sheriff last week to open a criminal investigation into business practices at a Regency park outside of Iowa City.

Now, several lawmakers said they are considering what legislative action might be necessary next year to better protect those who rent or buy older mobile homes.

"I think that may be the next thing the

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Victoria Bustamante says the road in front of her home at Country Village Estates mobile home park in Des Moines floods despite efforts by managers to fix sewers and streets. Read more about conditions at this park and others in Britt and Duncombe. **Page 7A**

Afghanistan deadline of 2014 is topic of meeting

The U.S. troop drawdown plan will be adopted at today's Kabul conference.

By **ROBERT H. REID**
Associated Press

Kabul, Afghanistan — The strategy sits for now on a table in a locked-down Afghan capital: Hand over security in all 34 provinces to the government by the end of 2014 — more than three years after President Barack Obama's date for the start of an American troop drawdown.

It will be adopted today at a one-day international conference, giving war-weary Americans and Europeans a date for when their involvement in Afghanistan may begin to come to an end.

It will also give President Hamid Karzai a chance to show whether his struggling government is making progress toward running the country.

The conference comes at a time of growing anxiety in the United States and Europe about the course of the war — concerns

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Wife's burial delayed after ashes stolen

By **TOM ALEX**
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Charles Duttweiler's car was broken into last week while he was visiting relatives in Des Moines.

He lost thousands of dollars' worth of items, including a new computer.

But what he really wants back are photographs of his wife, a laminated copy of her obituary, her death certificate — and her remains.

"None of that would mean anything to the guy who took them," said Duttweiler, a resident of Virginia who originally is from southeastern Iowa.

"The main thing I want back is my wife's remains and urn

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Dear Mr. Medvedev: Please come to Iowa

By **DAVID ELBERT**
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World Food Prize Foundation President Kenneth Quinn said Monday that he is inviting Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to Des Moines in 2011 to speak at the foundation's

annual symposium.

Quinn's announcement came during an informal luncheon at Drake University where Russian Sen. Mikhail Margelov was the guest of honor.

Also at the luncheon was Rachel Garst, granddaughter

of Iowa agribusinessman Roswell Garst, who hosted a visit by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to the Garst farm in Coon Rapids in 1958.

The luncheon discussion focused on current rela-

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Quinn said he's inviting the Russian president to visit Iowa.

Lawsuit targets Kline in house fire

A Wisconsin insurance company alleges that West Des Moines developer John Kline is responsible for intentionally setting a fire that destroyed his home in February 2009.

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High 83° Low 69°
Moderate rain; isolated thunderstorms. **Page 10B**

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ANDREA MELENDEZ/REGISTER PHOTOS

Former resident Robin Hull, right, and Victoria Bustamante say Country Village Estates in Des Moines has long-term sewage and standing-water problems. They also say rent was raised, but roads that were promised were never put in.

MOBILE

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oversight committee needs to look at," said Sen. Rich Olive, whose Story County district includes a problematic park in Huxley formerly owned by Regency of Iowa. "We need to look into some of these abuses and see what needs to be done."

Some lawmakers, like state Sen. Matt McCoy, D-Des Moines, believe park owners in Iowa should not be allowed to have an ownership interest in mobile homes for which they rent lots. State law allows park owners to evict those who lease lots for almost any reason, and unscrupulous park owners stand to profit when they evict mobile home owners likely to abandon their homes.

"The park owners have incentive to scam them," said McCoy, who also thinks contract, or third-party, sales of the oldest homes should be prohibited among park owners. "And those types tend to prey on the poor."

Others who wrote the newspaper said they believe state and city officials should enforce existing laws that prohibit fraud and ensure that park owners comply with existing city and county ordinances and state laws.

The Register's investigation highlighted problems with the Iowa City Regency park, where local officials described conditions as "deplorable." Conditions had existed for years, largely unattended to by local and state authorities.

Park owners say residents who complain about rising costs often do not understand that owners are contending with rising costs of their own.

Steve Nichols owns a newer park in Grimes, the source of two complaints

The story so far

A Des Moines Register investigation identified widespread health and safety hazards and problematic sales at mobile home parks currently or formerly owned by Regency of Iowa, a subsidiary of the Churchill Group of Colorado.

Other key findings

- Managers of a Regency park south of Iowa City failed to provide titles to some buyers when mobile homes were paid off, or to report changes in ownership to county officials — both required under state law. Failure to report changes in ownership keeps counties from collecting taxes on the homes and prevents buyers from proving ownership.

- Back taxes are owed on 116 of the 186 mobile homes at the Iowa City park.

- In the past five years, four Iowa cities — Council Bluffs, Huxley, Iowa City and Sioux City — have sued Churchill Group's president, a Colorado businessman and convicted felon who has racked up similar problems at trailer parks in other states.

At DesMoinesRegister.com/mobilehomes:

Share your experiences in dealing with aging mobile homes.

More coverage

The Register's report on the hazards of aging mobile homes will continue through the fall. Readers with concerns about aging mobile homes in an area should contact Register projects editor Lee Rood at (515) 284-8549 or lrood@dmreg.com.



Bustamante parks her truck well away from the sidewalk at Country Village Estates. If she doesn't, she often faces the prospect of stepping out of the vehicle into water and mud.

received by the Register. Nichols said his property taxes have increased about 11 percent every two years. But the lot rent at the park, which varies depending on lot size and when residents moved in, still trails those of some other metro-area parks.

The 2006-08 American Community Survey found that 81,321 people in Iowa

live in owner-occupied mobile homes and another 20,481 are renters.

County officials say issues with older mobile homes exist in almost every county. Those who buy them tend to be working poor families, the disabled, the elderly and immigrants. Most have little or no credit.

In 1976, regulations

passed by Congress upgraded mobile home construction standards to improve safety. Many parks don't accept mobile homes constructed before then. Many of those homes, relics of corrugated steel and plywood, and somewhat newer models are too dilapidated to survive a move.

Regency and its parent company, the Churchill Group, both of Carbon-dale, Colo., "sold" decrepit, unsafe mobile homes to which they did not have title, the Register found. At the 600-resident park south of Iowa City, the companies also charge the highest lot rent in Johnson County, even though the park has had serious water and sewage problems for years.

Housing advocates and government officials said owners and renters of aging mobile homes are at high risk of losing their investments because they have few rights in Iowa compared with park owners, and the homes are usually too old or expensive to move.

The articles prompted both the Johnson County Sheriff's Department and Iowa attorney general's office to encourage residents to contact them about suspected fraud. Iowa's Department of Natural Resources is also weighing whether to revoke the Iowa City park's water permit if long-standing problems are not fixed in 90 days.

State Sen. Joe Bolkom, D-Iowa City, said he believes local boards of health may need more authority to enforce existing laws because the Department of Natural Resources does not have the manpower. Delinquent taxes that go unpaid by scores of mobile home owners also are a statewide problem.

"We're going to have to see if there's a critical mass of legislators to do something," he said.

Works and seeing other residents' bills that she had been overcharged. She was referred to a private attorney.

Like Hull, Victoria Bustamante, who lives with her husband in Lot 33, was told she should consult a private attorney after calling the attorney general's office for help with her water bill and other problems, including abandoned homes and debris.

Bustamante said the road in front of her home still floods in spite of attempts by managers to fix sewers and patch the street.

"The city should come in and buy everybody out," Bustamante said. "This is a high-risk flood area, and this place is trashy."

Managers at the park could not be reached Friday or Monday for comment.

Britt

This northern Iowa city, like others around the state, took the owner of a local park to court recently because so many homes there were decaying. About a half-dozen of the oldest structures were unoccupied and had broken-out windows.

"It really stuck in my craw," City Councilman Curt Gast said. "This park was within a block of all the schools, near the United Methodist Church and the nursing home. Those trailers are what people who come to our community get to see — an eyesore."

The city persuaded the park owner to demolish some of the oldest homes, but Gast resents that the town was forced to use its time and money to get the owner to take action.

"I think this series really hit a nerve," Gast said. "Most towns have a park like this."

Duncombe

A park owner on June 30 gave residents 60 days to move, after selling the land to the co-op in this central Iowa town of 458.

The New Co-operative has advertised locally that the purchase is improving the community. "She had been trying to sell it for quite some time, and the cooperative wanted it to expand our grain elevator," said Afton Holt, a communications specialist for the co-op.

Residents say they are being forced to abandon homes or spend thousands to move.

Shylo Olson, a 31-year-old single parent of a 10-year-old, said she's trying to move the mobile home she's lived in at the park for 11 years, but she's having trouble getting a permit. "I wish we had more time," she said. "It doesn't seem right she can just up and do it that quick."

Amy Kohlewes, the owner, said that Iowa law gave her 60 days to evict tenants and that she had nothing more to say. "This is a business decision."

Where to get help

- People who believe they have been wronged in mobile home sales are encouraged to contact the Iowa attorney general's office. Consumers can find forms at www.state.ia.us/government/ag/consumer or by calling (515) 281-5926 or (888) 777-4590.

- Low-income people and seniors with questions or problems with mobile homes can call Iowa Legal Aid at (800) 532-1275.

- Owners who cannot afford to pay taxes on mobile homes may be eligible for a tax credit by contacting the county treasurer.

To take action

- Go to www.legis.state.ia.us to contact state legislators about Iowa state law regarding mobile homes.

- To find out whether building or rental codes cover mobile homes in a county or to initiate changes in an ordinance, contact the local board of supervisors. Board contact information is at www.iowacounties.org. Click on links, then county websites.

THEFT

FROM PAGE 1A

and the pictures and certificates," Duttweiler said. "They can keep the rest. They obviously need it more than I do."

Shirley Duttweiler, 69, originally of Winfield, died in April of cancer and relat-

ed complications. Charles Duttweiler, who is staying with a relative in eastern Iowa, was planning a memorial service and burial of the cremains.

The service has been postponed while police search for the thief.

Charles Duttweiler is saving pieces of the broken beer bottle that shattered

Information

Anyone with information about the theft should call Des Moines police detective Dean Stuhr at (515) 237-1470.

the window of his vehicle. He said he thought there might be fingerprints on the broken glass.

Officers said that even if they found fingerprints, it might not help the case. Anyone could have been drinking the beer. The culprit may have found the bottle and then shattered the window.

Duttweiler, 73, said his 2000 Mercury Grand Marquis was in a downtown Des Moines parking garage

on Friday.

"Someone broke out the window with a brown beer bottle and there was broken glass inside and outside the car," said Duttweiler, who was visiting a brother downtown.

The remains were inside a plastic bag, which was inside a black urn, which was inside a black box.

The box had Duttweiler's wife's name on it.

The black box was inside a white cardboard box, which was in a green AAFES (Army & Air Force Exchange Service) bag.

"It's pretty obvious they just grabbed things and left," Duttweiler said. "If I could just get the cremains back I would be happy."



DRAKE UNIVERSITY/SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Kenneth Quinn, left, president of the World Food Prize Foundation, met with visiting Russian Sen. Mikhail Margelov during a luncheon at Drake University on Monday.

VISIT

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tions between Russia and the United States. Margelov at one point said the two countries need more "institutionalized relations" between a broad range of governmental and business groups, rather than focusing on the personal relations between the top leaders of both nations.

Valentina Forminykh, a Russian immigrant to Iowa, suggested more exchanges, like the visits between Khrushchev and

Garst in the 1950s.

A short time later Quinn said: "As someone who is capable of extending such an invitation, I'd like Senator Margelov to carry a letter from me to President Medvedev to come visit us in October 2011."

That is when the World Food Prize will dedicate its

new headquarters building in Des Moines.

Quinn told Margelov there is precedent for such a visit, noting that when Microsoft founder Bill Gates wanted to make a major address about world food security, he did it at the World Food Prize symposium in Des Moines last October.

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