

Use of Composts Containing Biosolids

The distribution and use of composts made from Biosolids (organic matter recovered from the treatment of wastewater) is regulated by both the US EPA and various state regulatory agencies. Composts distributed by Agresource meet the highest standards established by state agencies and EPA (Class A Exceptional Quality) and therefore can be safely used on home lawns and landscapes.

The compost should always be applied at the recommended rates. Soil testing may be required for some uses and a professional horticulturalist should be contacted regarding specific applications when in doubt.

The certification of the compost is based on the compost meeting specific limits for various metals (e.g., cadmium, copper, lead, mercury, and zinc) and potential pathogenic microbes (Fecal Coliform and Salmonella bacteria). These regulatory limits were established after years of University research and extended periods of public comment. Although individual states may vary in the specific metals that they regulate, limits set by individual state agencies must be as least as strict as those established by the EPA. The limits set by the EPA are established to protect individuals who may use compost in a home vegetable garden and consume those vegetables as a major source of food over an extended period.

Testing of the compost is performed on a regular basis using certified independent laboratories. Test results are provided to the local State agencies for review. Concentrations of metals in the compost are in all cases well below regulatory limits established by EPA and various New England State agencies. In many cases (such as mercury) the concentrations are typically less than one tenth the regulated level.

Some of the regulated metals (e.g., copper and zinc) are important trace elements needed by both plants and animals for proper growth and development. The concentration of these elements in the compost may be lower than that of fertilizers and vitamin supplements.

Common sense precautions should be used when storing and handling compost. Because compost does contain plant nutrients, care should be taken when storing large quantities to prevent possible runoff into surface water. Small children who may put compost into their mouths or eat soil should be prevented from playing on storage piles. Those who apply the compost should wash their hands after handling the compost and avoid breathing compost dust.

A general review of the regulatory and health issues governing the use of biosolids products can be obtained from the EPA and the New England Biosolids and Residuals Association (NEBRA). A good overall guide to regulations is the Plain English Guide to EPA Part 503 Biosolids Rule, EPA 832/6-93/003. Web sites for the EPA (www.epa.gov/epasower/non-hw/compost) and NEBRA (www.nebiosolids.org) may also be contacted for further information.