

# Future use and application of mixed waste organic material

**The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is stopping the use of mixed waste organic material on agricultural land, and is ceasing use on plantation forests and mining rehabilitation land until further controls can be considered.**

## How can I find out if this is relevant to me?

This relates to you if you have applied this material on your land as a soil amendment. Information about the regulatory changes are contained in this fact sheet. If you have additional questions about the material and research the EPA commissioned, or want to stay updated, more information is available from:

1. Website: [www.epa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au)
2. Environment Line on 131 555
3. Email [info@epa.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@epa.nsw.gov.au)

## What is mixed waste organic material?

Mixed waste organic material (the material) is a soil amendment made predominantly from the organic material in household general waste (red-lid bin). It is then sold or provided for use on agricultural land, mine-site rehabilitation and plantation forests.

Since mixed waste organic material was first produced 20 years ago, there has been a shift to greater separation of organic materials (food and garden waste) from general waste. Many councils are moving to this model.

It is produced at alternative waste treatment facilities, primarily to divert red-lid bin waste from landfill.

While it is formally known as mixed waste organic material/output (MWOO), it may have been given different names by manufacturers and suppliers e.g. organic growth media (OGM), Agriblend, Rehab-ARRT Rejuvenate, Pasture-ARRT Rejuvenate.

## Regulation of the material

Until 2010, the manufacture and distribution of mixed waste organic material was unregulated.

The NSW EPA began regulating the industry and imposed restrictions in 2010 around the production and land application of the material. It prescribed strict controls on how much material could be applied to agricultural land, stipulating the types of agriculture it could be used for, and applying withholding periods for agriculture products post-application.

The material could be applied at a maximum rate of:

- 10 tonnes per hectare for broadacre agriculture (excluding keeping/breeding of poultry or pigs, food root crops, vegetables or crops where the harvested parts touch or are below the surface of the land)
- 50 tonnes per hectare for non-contact agricultural use (fruit or nut trees or vines but not where fallen produce is or may be collected off the ground) or plantation forestry use
- 140 tonnes per hectare for site rehabilitation at mine sites.

It also prohibited its use for domestic and urban purposes.

## Why has the exemption been removed?

At the time the NSW EPA began regulating the industry and it imposed the restrictions, an extensive, independent, multi-year research program was commissioned utilising CSIRO, the NSW Department of Primary Industries, University of Sydney, University of New England and Office of Environment and Heritage.

This is consistent with the EPA's ongoing regulatory role into the use and application of the material.

The research results have been peer-reviewed by local and international experts. The research concluded that there are limited agricultural or soil benefits from applying mixed waste organic material at the current regulated rates, but there are physical contaminants, such as small pieces of plastic and glass, and potential environmental risks.

### Are there any health concerns?

Following the extensive research program, the NSW EPA commissioned an independent assessment of possible health risks related to the use of this product on agricultural land.

This assessment used very cautious assumptions. Based on a review of the initial findings, the use of the material on agricultural land is unlikely to present any health risk to the general public, including consumers buying produce.

The NSW Food Authority and NSW Health have reviewed the initial findings of the assessment and expert scientific advice and further work is being done.

The risk for farmers who applied the material to their land is very low. Any farmers who want to discuss how they have used the product are encouraged to contact the EPA.

### Does this apply to compost?

No. Compost and biosolid products have their own resource recovery orders and exemptions, i.e. regulatory rules that must be met in order to be land applied. They are quite different as these waste materials are derived from different inputs.

The research findings and regulatory changes only apply to organic outputs from mixed waste.

Compost is made from any combination of mulch, garden organics, food waste, manure and paunch that has undergone a composting process. It has been broken down by microbes having reached certain temperatures to destroy pathogens, seeds and other weeds.

In the context of domestic kerbside recovery, compost is made from food and garden waste that is separated at the kerbside in the green-lid bin, so it is not mixed with general waste before it is processed.

There are still requirements about how it is made and applied to land, but they are less strict because it is a cleaner waste recovery stream.

### Affected stakeholders

The NSW EPA understands there are important implications for a number of stakeholders.

The EPA has taken a careful, coordinated and deliberate approach to prioritise environmental and community health.

The EPA and other agencies including NSW Health, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Planning and Environment, and Premier and Cabinet will work with all stakeholders to support them as they manage these changes.

### What do I need to do?

- Stop applying mixed waste organic material to your land.
- If you have any of this material stored, contact the EPA.
- There is no change to the use of compost, which you can continue to use.
- Stay up-to-date by visiting the NSW EPA website.

### How to contact the EPA

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NSW Environment Protection Authority  
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