

Applying compost and biosolids to land

Biosolids and compost made from source-separated food and/or garden waste provide benefits when applied to land and help to reduce waste going to landfill.

Key points

- Organics waste, like biosolids and food and garden waste, when separated by households and properly processed into compost, is a highly beneficial resource that can help improve soils, boost crop yields and improve water retention.
- There are controls in place in NSW around the creation, treatment and use of organics as a compost.
- Compost is made from source-separated food and/or garden waste and not from processed general household (red-lid bin) waste.
- Compost still has benefits when applied in small amounts – at 10 tonnes per hectare or less.
- In October 2018, the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) stopped the use of mixed waste organic material (made predominantly from the organic material in general household waste) on agricultural land and mine site rehabilitation until further controls can be considered.

Where do I go for more information?

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au/mixed-waste-organics

Environment Line on **131 555**.

Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Most suppliers should be able to provide you with the necessary information.



Can I still apply compost and biosolids to land?

Yes. As long as the main ingredients are processed and used in accordance with rules set down by the EPA, the recycled organic product is safe and allowed to be applied to land.

The EPA's regulatory framework is designed to ensure that waste materials can be re-used in a way that is beneficial and does not cause harm to human health or the environment.

As a customer, you can be confident in applying organics material if it is produced in accordance with EPA rules. If you are unsure, check your supplier's documentation which should show that all processing requirements have been met.

It is the customer's responsibility to apply the product to land in accordance with the rules.

For further information on the types of organics waste and the rules relating to recycled organic materials, see page 2 of this fact sheet.

Why do we recycle this material?

NSW is committed to increasing recycling and reducing waste to landfill, where it is safe and beneficial to do so. Organics waste, like food and garden waste, accounts for the highest proportion of waste from households and about a quarter of all waste from businesses in NSW.

If it is separated by households and properly processed into compost, this waste is a highly beneficial resource that can help improve soils, boost crop yields and improve water retention.

Compost has benefits, even when applied in small amounts to land, i.e. at 10 tonnes per hectare or less.

When it ends up in landfill, raw organic waste has significant negative impacts on the environment. As it rots, organics waste produces methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

The controls we have placed on how recycled organics are processed and used enable us to recycle this valuable resource while helping to improve soil quality.

What's the difference between compost, mixed waste organic material and other products?

All recycled organics products have controls to ensure they are both beneficial and safe for the environment.

Compost (still available) is any combination of organic matter such as mulch, garden organics, food waste, manure and paunch that is broken down by a process that involves microbes and heat.

Most compost in NSW comes from household food and/or garden waste that has been separated by households and placed in the green-lid bin. When processed to the EPA's requirements, compost can be used freely on land to improve soil health and structure.

Composted materials must reach a sufficient and sustained temperature to destroy harmful microorganisms, seeds and other weeds. The composting process and testing requirements are specified by the EPA in the compost order.

Biosolids (still available) are an organic product made from treated sewage, sometimes referred to as sewage sludge.

Biosolids are widely applied to land with additional conditions regarding how they are applied and when stock are permitted to graze on the land.

Biosolids must be processed in accordance with the EPA's *Environmental Guidelines: Use and Disposal of Biosolids Products*, undergo thorough testing and meet strict record keeping and reporting requirements.

Mixed waste organic material (no longer available) is a soil amendment made predominantly from the organic material in household general waste (red-lid bin) processed at an alternative waste treatment (AWT) facility. It was used in some agricultural industries, mine-site rehabilitation and plantation forests as specified in the EPA exemption for use.

This material can no longer be used on agricultural land and its use on mine-site rehabilitation land and plantation forestry has ceased, until further controls can be considered.

Rules for applying recycled waste to land in NSW

The EPA has controls around how waste materials can be applied to land through the Resource Recovery Framework. The Framework allows wastes to be re-used when they can be shown to:

- provide a benefit
- be fit-for-purpose, and
- pose minimal risk of harm to the environment and human health.

Resource Recovery Orders (orders) control:

- which waste materials can be recovered
- how they must be processed and
- specifications for the end product, including testing requirements.

Resource Recovery Exemptions (exemptions) control how and where these recycled materials can be used.

Processors or manufacturers have a responsibility to meet the requirements of the orders. The customer or end user is responsible for how it is used, as contained in the exemptions.

How to contact the EPA

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

24/7 Environment Line on **131 555**

Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Photo

Compost pile at waste transfer station; Evolving Images/EPA

References

NSW Environment Protection Authority

Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

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