



American Public Works Association

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Advocacy Position Statement

MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE ORGANICS RECYCLING

Statement of Purpose

The American Public Works Association seeks to inform elected officials, regulators, policy-makers and decision-makers and the public at-large of its stated position on municipal solid waste organics recycling.

Statement of Position

APWA supports and encourages recycling of the organic fractions of municipal solid waste.

Background and Rationale

The American Public Works Association (APWA) believes that local general-purpose governments are, in most instances, ultimately responsible for the protection of public health and, consequently, the environmentally sound management of municipal solid waste (MSW). In concert with the waste management hierarchy adopted by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state governments, the management of MSW should focus on re-education, reuse, recycling, energy-recovery and divert the waste from the least desirable option, land disposal. In an effort to meet the landfill diversion goals set by the EPA, the APWA supports and encourages the recycling of the organic fractions of MSW. Recycling of organics will not only provide a means to achieve and exceed the desired goals, but can also generate compost, a beneficial product, with known and viable end uses and market value.

During the past decades municipal governments have advanced from unregulated disposal of waste to a more controlled environment. The main focus of this transition has been to close uncontrolled land disposal sites and shift to more environmentally sound land disposal facilities. The majority of waste continues to be disposed of in landfills, which is the least desirable option in the waste management hierarchy. In general, land disposal was, and is, a known entity and for the most part, readily available to municipal governments. Therefore, there has been no incentive within municipal governments to advance beyond land disposal or to manage waste as a resource. The majority of municipalities have implemented, to varying degrees, the recycling of readily separated

materials such as metal, plastic and glass containers, some paper products and yard/green waste. These efforts have increased the amount diverted from 10% to well over 30%. Organics consists primarily of green waste (leaves, grass, brush), food waste, paper based products, food processing waste and other biodegradable materials. Several states have banned green waste from disposal while others actively encourage organics diversion. More recently, food waste has been incorporated into the recycled organics waste stream. The diversion of organics has helped many communities reach their established goals.

Organics are recycled through composting. In the past, composting has not been particularly popular due to issues with odors and product quality. Technological advancements have significantly improved odor control capabilities, as well as the quality of the end product. Traditionally, composting of green/yard waste is a well-established process. The composting of household waste, biosolids and industrial non-hazardous organic waste (primarily food processing waste), although relatively new, has shown increased participation. With the advancement in technology and the proven success of several facilities, the composting of the municipal waste stream can become an integral component of waste management. Compost generated from organic recycling can be produced in varying degrees of quality depending on the end use market. The demand for compost is proportional to the quality and availability. Some of the established areas of compost include: landscaping, silvaculture, horticulture, land reclamation, agriculture, site remediation, soil enhancement, etc. Use of compost has been shown to benefit stormwater and erosion controls, assist with the handling of road kill and livestock carcasses, and the reduction of land applied chemicals through the use of compost teas. The management of the waste stream as a resource has a two-fold benefit: The diversion of waste from landfills and the production of beneficial compost. Composting is one of the best examples of a closed loop system for solid waste management.

An abundance of landfills and the associated low disposal fee costs have historically been a disincentive for the implementation of organic waste composting for many cities and communities. APWA supports sustainable composting at all levels and encourages the EPA and USDA to develop incentives for both municipal composting and on-farm composting for municipal organic waste materials.”

Sponsor

Solid Waste Management Committee