

AN OVERVIEW OF COMPOSTING FACILITY PERMITTING IN REGION 4 AND CURRENT ISSUES BEING ADDRESSED BY THE UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY THAT AFFECT COMPOSTING FACILITY OWNERS AND OPERATORS

Davy Simonson, Environmental Scientist, U.S. EPA Region 4, Atlanta, Georgia

In late 1998, a workgroup within the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created for the purpose of providing an internal forum for sharing information and ideas regarding sensible and appropriate management of organic materials. This includes many different types of organic materials that currently exist in America's solid waste stream. This workgroup, which includes members from all ten EPA Regional offices and from EPA's Office of Solid Waste (OSW) in Washington, D.C., is referred to as the Organic Materials Management (OMM) Workgroup. The degree of direct involvement with specific composting issues by individual EPA Regional staff and Headquarters (EPA HQ) staff on the OMM Workgroup is quite varied and is dependent upon a number of factors. It is clear however, that since composting is an obvious and significant component for establishing fully successful integrated solid waste management systems, there exists great untapped potential for the future expansion of compost markets across the country. From this viewpoint, primary keys to successful market expansion (and particularly to the potential rate of expansion) include elevated levels of public awareness and education, wide-open communications, and the ability of different groups to work together to achieve mutual goals in solid waste management initiatives. Also, improved information sharing among the many different entities that are involved with the various aspects of composting will be very important. All of these things are integral parts of the equation for accelerating the development of new markets, for enhancing the markets that currently exist and for identifying potential future markets for compost use.

EPA provides technical assistance toward the design, development, improvement and enhancement of composting projects and initiatives around the country, and to a lesser degree to foreign countries. In addition to offering technical assistance, EPA has also provided financial support to various composting initiatives. For example, EPA HQ provided funding to the U.S. Composting Council (USCC) to establish and implement the "Seal of Testing Assurance" (STA) program. This year, the USCC has been provided funds for a program that will promote the use of compost for roadside landscaping nationwide on a state and local level. Moreover, a priority of EPA HQ is promoting the use of compost by various federal agencies under Executive Order 13148. This includes roadside projects by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Other EPA HQ initiatives involve studying compost's role in global warming, bioremediation, carbon sequestration and nutrient management issues to name a few. New concepts and applications are being examined to include:

- the potential use of compost landfill covers to oxidize methane gas;
- the economic benefits of source-separated composting compared to landfill bioreactors;
- the role of organics in the federal government's push for increased development of bio-based products and energy, per Executive Order 13134.

Region 4's Solid Waste Management Program has provided financial assistance and management of Cooperative Assistance Agreements for a variety of compost-related projects. These have included:

- development of composting educational materials including videos, slide presentations and training manuals;
- a three-year project demonstrating the effectiveness of a food waste windrow composting operation and particle screening process;
- a study on improving efficiency of composting by control of the solid matrix structure;
- a compost evaluation study to determine effects of alternative processing modifications;
- an evaluation of the effect of blending various organic wastes (e.g., biosolids, poultry, cattle and food wastes) with the separated organic fraction of municipal solid wastes on performance and product quality from composting;
- development of a vermicomposting teacher training guide and video;
- assistance with the promotion of backyard composting efforts.

Other involvement in compost-related activities by Region 4 include: assisting American Indian Tribes with development of successful composting operations; assisting with the organization of composting conferences and workshops; promoting and participating in meetings and other events that involve state and local composting organizations; disseminating EPA documents and literature to persons interested in OMM and composting; and, speaking with school children about composting and other OMM topics.

A primary objective of Region 4's OMM strategy is to develop an infrastructure of all entities in the Region that are involved with the management of organic materials. This effort will lend itself to the promotion of open communications and to the sharing of valuable information with regard to all types of OMM, including composting activities. It should also result in less trial and error on the part of those wishing to successfully start and maintain OMM projects or businesses. Included within this infrastructure will be representatives of various federal, state, tribal, county and municipal governments (including both regulatory and non-regulatory aspects), researchers, businesses, non-profit organizations and any other interested groups or individuals. Members of this infrastructure have the ultimate common objective of diverting organic materials from the solid waste stream and subsequently utilizing those materials in a more practical, sensible and economically feasible manner.

As an important part of developing the Region 4 OMM infrastructure, a review of the permitting processes of individual Region 4 state environmental programs (i.e., those in Alabama, Florida, Georgia,

Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee) has revealed quite some diversity in the ways and in the types of permits that are issued to composting facilities. Likewise, the relationship between Region 4 and each of the states with regard to the

permitting of composting facilities that utilize biosolids is also somewhat different from state to state. Specifics of the individual state permitting programs and their permitting processes for composting facilities in the eight Region 4 states will be presented and open for discussion at EPA's poster session during the Y2K Composting in the Southeast Conference & Exposition.