



Composting News

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EPA grant will kick-start compost testing, certification

By Ken McEntee

The U.S. Composting Council has received a \$45,000 grant from the U.S. EPA to implement the council's Seal of Testing Compliance (STC) program and to begin creation of a national curriculum for composter certification.

The council has contracted with consultant Ron Alexander to organize the programs. Alexander is chairman of the council's Market Development Committee.

The council has been working for more than two years to develop the STC program, through which a council-sponsored logo would be licensed to products that meet certain testing criteria.

"In essence it is a disclosure program," said George Garland, of the EPA. "It is not saying you have to have this much of something in the products, but you have to say how much you have relative to the job you expect it to be able to do."

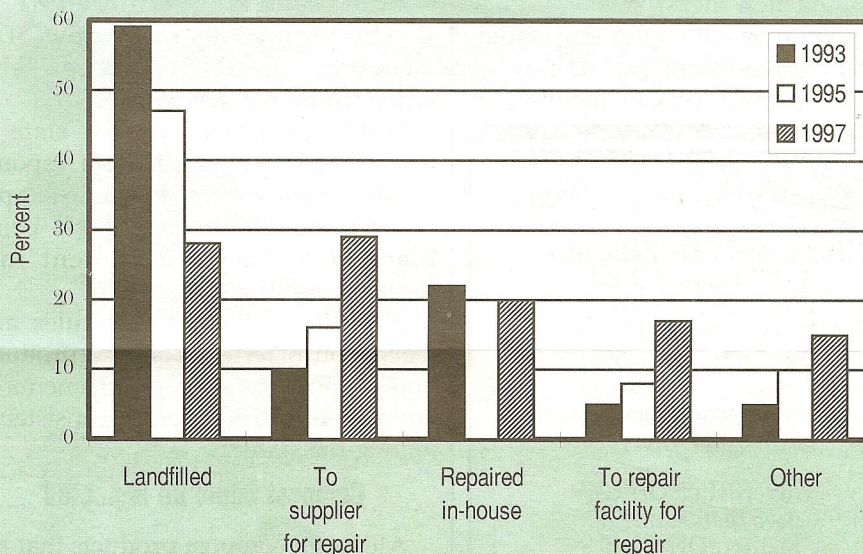
Compost producers who want to display the logo must perform regular testing on their product using testing methods defined in the council's Test Methods for the Examination of Compost and Composting (TMECC). They also must disclose certain information about the compost and provide directions for use on the product.

Producers would be charged a fee to

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More pallets are being recycled

Pallet users are increasingly sending their damaged wood pallets to repair facilities or back to pallet suppliers for repair before the pallets are reused, the National Wooden Pallet and Container Association said. Following are the trends between 1993 and 1997. For more information, see the article on page 10)



Composting, pasteurization compared at USDA agricultural lab

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has begun testing to compare pasteurization with composting of cow manure. Patricia D. Millner, research leader of the USDA Soil Microbial Systems Laboratory in Beltsville, Md., has begun experiments which will assess each system for its ability to kill pathogens and control odor.

She also will test a hybrid system that combines quicker composting with the pasteurization technique, USDA said.

An experiment started last month is being conducted to determine whether

pasteurization is an effective means of killing *E. coli*, *Cryptosporidium parvum* and other pathogens possibly lurking in

(See USDA, page 6)

Highlights

- AAPFCO may revise heavy metals limits in fertilizer
- Biocorp injunction lifted by court after \$1 million judgement
- Largest composting plant in the Midwest opens

AAPFCO

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prominently visible and shall contain, at a minimum, the following information in a readable and conspicuous form:

- Net weight or volume;
- Brand name under which the compost is distributed;
- Ingredient statement; Provided that the (state) by regulation may permit the use of a collective term for a group of ingredients which perform a similar function;
- Name and complete address of the distributor;
- Directions for use including application rates; and
- Restrictions on the use of the compost product, if applicable. In case of bulk shipments, this information in written or printed form shall accompany delivery and be supplied to the purchaser at time of delivery.

The bill also contains a provision dealing with misbranding or mislabeling

of compost. It also contains a provision for state inspection and inspection fees based on a per-ton rate and state reporting requirements for producers. The bill says a "stop-sale" order may be issued by the state to producers of compost that is sold or distributed in violation of the bill.

In addition to the EPA 503 limits on heavy metals concentrations, the draft bill places limitations on content of PCBs (5 mg/kg dry weight), man-made sharps, Fecal Coliform and Salmonella spp.

See the *Composting News* web site at www.recycle.cc for a link to the complete draft on the USCC web site.

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Grant

From page 1

participate in the program. A lack of funding has delayed implementation of the project, but the grant has started the ball rolling, Alexander said.

"The idea is to get the whole program

set up so that on January 1, 2000 we will begin a one-year pilot," he said. "The whole goal of the program is to get composters testing properly and giving that data back to end users and providing good application instructions, which has been a real problem for our industry."

Alexander said he is seeking 20 to 30 compost producers to participate in the one-year pilot of the project.

"We hope that by the end of 2000 we will have all of the bugs worked out and the program can go from there," he said.

Alexander said the \$45,000 is not a huge amount of money, but it will allow for the administration of the pilot program

"I have an artist working on a logo and am working with an attorney to deal with the legal issues," he said. "The real issue is how we word things so that (the council) doesn't have liability. We are not guaranteeing the quality of the products. We are guaranteeing that there

(See Grant, page 6)

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are certain things that are getting done (testing and disclosure)."

The most important work will be in promoting the logo as a nationally-accepted sign of consistent and quality testing procedures. That will entail a major national marketing effort, which will be funded by the participating producers.

"The seal isn't worth a damn unless we can promote it heavily with the people who are going to use compost," Alexander said.

Garland said EPA is concerned that many states are considering their own testing and labelling requirements, which would create interstate marketing problems.

"From EPA's standpoint we were concerned that nationally there were many states that were going to be doing their own thing and that would lead to a chaotic situation around the country and we want to avoid that," he said. "So we want to get to a point of having an agreed-upon set of variable and procedures. With the grant, the Composting Council can

work with the players, meaning the state composting councils, to come up with a quality assurance program that will identify items that should be reported on a bag of compost before it gets the seal. In addition on the bag they have to put instructions for use so that it will be clear what the compost was intended to do."

National curriculum

Garland said the other part of the grant calls for the council to work with universities and other providers of courses for composters to come to an agreement on what the essential elements of a compost course are.

Toward that goal, the council will hold a workshop next month of organizations that offer courses to compare notes and come to a meeting of minds as to what should be in a composting course. A final recommendation from the council would be placed by the EPA into the Federal Register as a proposed core curriculum for compost certification course.

"We would ask for comments and use the results to further the cause of an agreement in America over what a composter should know," Garland said.

Once a final document is created, he

said, it would not be law, but would be a guideline that the council or state organizations could promote.

"It would sort of be up to the U.S. Composting Council and the state composting councils to get aggressive about it," Garland said. "The drumbeat is that there is a lot of enthusiasm for it. There are some folks on Capital Hill that have said this is the direction that you folks should be moving. It would lend some credibility to the industry."

Volunteers wanted

Alexander said he has already had about 15 companies volunteer to be a part of the pilot for the STC program and he is seeking a total of 20 to 30. Anybody interested may call Alexander at (919) 388-0030.

USDA

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cow manure, to make sure it can be used safely to improve soils. N-Viro International, of Toledo, Ohio, loaned USDA patented equipment used to pasteurize biosolids. The equipment, consisting of a vertical and horizontal silo with a manure hopper and mixing bins in between, to a composting facility at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (ARC). The equipment mixes recycled materials like cement or lime kiln dust, coal ash from electric power plants and gypsum with manure. A natural chemical reaction occurs when the lime or other high-calcium material hits the manure, creating heat, ammonia and high pH that kill pathogens.

Millner said she wants to see if the pasteurization process will also convert phosphorus in manure to a form less likely to leach into streams and rivers.

"We will also test the addition of materials such as alum residue from wastewater treatment plants for their ability to stabilize phosphorus in manure," she said.

Floyd P. Horn, administrator of the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), said if the experiment works it could help areas such as the Chesapeake



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