

Frequently  
Asked  
Questions  
About the  
**Harford  
County  
Biosolids  
Recycling  
Program**

For more information, contact:

Harford County Department of Public Works  
Division of Water and Sewer  
Sod Run Wastewater Treatment Plant  
1212 Chelsea Road, Perryman, MD 21130

410-273-5617 or 410-273-5619.

Also, please visit the Harford County website  
at <http://www.harfordcountymd.gov>



**Q** What are Biosolids and where do they come from?

**A** Harford County's Sod Run Advanced Wastewater treatment facility processes millions of gallons of wastewater per day. This advanced treatment generates a residual organic material which is commonly referred to as sludge. When sludge undergoes further processing, including biological stabilization in preparation for beneficial utilization, it is referred to as "biosolids".

**Q** How does the County's Biosolids Beneficial Use Program benefit me?

**A** This program exemplifies how public-private partnerships benefit all members of our community. Land application of biosolids helps save financial resources (\$\$\$)! The County's and yours! Savings are realized through: reduced wastewater treatment costs, reduced sludge disposal costs, and reduced amount of chemical fertilizer required for crop production.

Improving our environment is another benefit. Biosolids are an effective soil conditioner. The organic content improves soil structure, increases moisture retention, prevents soil compaction, and supplies micro-nutrients for healthy plant growth and high crop yield.

**Q** Since biosolids are a by-product of the wastewater treatment process, are they safe?

**A** Biosolids are safe when applied according to the current proper State and local control measures. Environmental, agricultural, and health considerations are paramount concerns of our Biosolids Beneficial Use Program. Harford County's land application program for biosolids is conducted under strict federal and state regulations. To further ensure a high quality end product the County has implemented a pro-active, national award winning industrial user pretreatment program. Monitoring licensed septage haulers, industrial site inspections, sampling and laboratory analysis are all important parts of our wastewater and biosolids quality assurance program.

**Q** Are all biosolids of the same quality and do certain restrictions apply to biosolids generated from different wastewater treatment facilities?

**A** There are differences in the physical (percent solids), chemical, and biological (pathogen reduction) characteristics of biosolids. Harford County's Pretreatment program is designed to prevent excessive levels of un-wanted pollutants (dissolved metals and other hazardous chemicals) from entering the wastewater stream in the first place. Sod Run also has strict

monitoring and sampling regulatory requirements which must be fulfilled daily. These important control measures ensure that the biosolids generated from Sod Run meet the USEPA criteria for a “high quality” biosolids material. Other facilities may have different regulatory monitoring requirements or have not fully implemented a pretreatment program.

**Q** Who monitors the land application of biosolids in the agricultural community?

**A** Specialized businesses, with equipment and trained personnel, are responsible for all contractual obligations associated with the County’s biosolids land application program. Contractor responsibilities include: enrollment of farmers and landowners; securing the required acreage and appropriate state and local permits; evaluating and calculating land/crop nutrients requirements; and proper transportation and biosolids application procedures.

The Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) is the primary regulatory authority overseeing this specialized industry. MDE assures that all regulatory requirements are met and enforced. The development of “Safety Factors” assures that the land application of biosolids is safe with regards to both human and environmental health. Safety factors include required buffer zones near houses, wells, or streams; nutrient management plans (which is not required when other types of fertilizer are used); and site inspections.

**Q** If I use Biosolids on my agricultural land, will my well and drinking water be contaminated?

**A** No. Biosolids application is based on and limited to the annual application rate of available nitrogen as it applies to crop nutrient requirements. The major concern with land application of nitrogen sources is the potential for excess nitrogen not used by the plants for growth and development to leach or percolate through the soil and end up in our drinking water aquifers. A state-certified Nutrient Manager will evaluate nitrogen requirements for specified crop production and recommend the correct biosolids application rate. As a further safeguard, the County has an inspection program specifying procedures for proper application.

**Q** Will odors occur when biosolids are land applied?

**A** Yes. However, biosolids have undergone additional stabilization processes which helps reduce the release of odor-causing compounds. Lime is also added to reduce odors. Most people notice a slight “earthy” odor after biosolids have been applied. If there is an off property odor it usually dissipates within a short period of time. The ability of the farmer to spread manure and biosolids, regardless of major odors, is normally a County regulated allowance.

**Q** Will the use of biosolids affect my land or restrict future land use?

**A** The answer is no as long as proper controls and established safeguards have been observed and followed. Some short term restrictions may apply regarding types of crops or vegetables raised, animal grazing prohibitions, or public use directly after biosolids application.

**Q** How will I know if biosolids are benefitting farmers in my community?

**A** The Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) conducts public information meetings to notify surrounding neighbors of properties land applying biosolids.

**Q** How will I know who's participating in the Biosolids Program?

**A** Land application program participants may display a County program recognition sign or plaque "Outstanding in our Fields" or call the Division of Water & Sewer.

**T**his brochure, produced by the Harford County Department of Public Works, Division of Water and Sewer, has been developed to help you understand that some materials previously thought of as waste products have a real and important beneficial value to the members of our community.

Health and hygiene instruction from our earliest ages has taught us that waste products, especially human wastes, are dirty, germ-infested, and generally unhealthy.

Modern day advances in waste water treatment protects public health and hygiene, and our precious waterways. Advanced treatment processes for waste water also generates a residual organic material - biosolids - which can be used as an organic fertilizer and soil conditioner.

It is fortunate that our rural and agricultural community has appreciated the benefits derived from using animal manures as an important natural fertilizer. Biosolids are now used to supplement crop nutrient requirements.

Our hope is that the information presented in this brochure will give you and enlightened and different perspective on the importance of using biosolids in agricultural and rural applications and the overall benefits of Harford County's Biosolids Program.