

DATE: April 29, 2020**FILE:** 5340-05**TO:** Chair and Directors
Electoral Areas Services Committee**FROM:** Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative OfficerSupported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer***R. Dyson*****RE: Biosolids – Land Application Regulation Overview****Purpose**

This report presents information on land application of biosolids in response to a prior request from the Electoral Areas Services Committee.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

None. This report is for information only.

Executive Summary

- Biosolids are the solid waste particles remaining once wastewater has been treated. They contain macronutrients and organic matter that can replenish soil and help it to retain moisture.
- Due to the resources present in biosolids, their beneficial re-use is considered favourable to landfilling.
- Beneficial re-use options for biosolids, as identified by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, include forest or agricultural land application, compost production, energy production or land reclamation.
- Approximately two-thirds of biosolids produced in BC are beneficially re-used as compost (such as the Comox Valley Regional District's SkyRocket product) or through land application and reclamation.
- In BC, biosolids compost production and land application is regulated by the Organic Matter Recycling Regulation (OMRR).
- OMRR stipulates quality requirements that must be met before biosolids or biosolids-derived compost can be used.
- OMRR also includes additional requirements, provided by a qualified professional in a land application plan, prior to the application of biosolids on land.
- The application of biosolids on agricultural land is also regulated by the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) Use, Subdivision and Procedures Regulation.

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Background/Current Situation

Biosolids are a stabilized by-product of wastewater treatment, defined by BC's Organic Matter Recycling Regulation (OMRR) as “stabilized municipal sewage sludge resulting from a municipal waste water treatment process or septage treatment process which has been sufficiently treated to reduce pathogen densities and vector attraction to allow the sludge to be beneficially recycled in accordance with the requirements of this regulation.”

Management of wastewater biosolids in Canada is guided by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) 2012 publication “Canada-Wide Approach for the Management of Wastewater Biosolids” ([link](#)). The policy established in this document promotes the beneficial use of resources contained within municipal biosolids, based on principles that recognize the resource value of biosolids, while minimizing potential risks to human and environmental health.

Agricultural land application as a fertilizer or soil conditioner is one of the management options identified in the CCME document. Other options include energy production, compost and soil products, forestry land application and land reclamation. While land application of biosolids is the most prevalent management option used in many regions of the world, there can be significant variations in rates of land application between jurisdictions, even within the same region.

On Vancouver Island, there are several biosolids management practices in place, including the Comox Valley Sewerage Service's production of SkyRocket, a Class A compost created by mixing wood chips with biosolids from the Brent Road wastewater treatment plant. The Town of Ladysmith has also recently started producing Class A compost from their biosolids. Biosolids from the Capital Regional District's new McLaughlin Point wastewater treatment plant will be sent to the lower mainland as an alternative fuel for cement production, with the CRD currently proposing land application on active or closed portions of the Hartland Landfill for short time frames when cement production ceases.

Land application of biosolids is practiced by the Regional District of Nanaimo, the City of Powell River and the Municipality of North Cowichan. The Regional District of Nanaimo's biosolids are primarily used in a forest land application project near Doumont Road. The City of Powell River and Municipality of North Cowichan have recently completed an agricultural land application on a property near the Hamm Road interchange in Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Puntledge – Black Creek (Electoral Area C); land application at this property is also under consideration by the RDN.

Common concerns with biosolids management options include the potential for ground and surface water contamination with pathogens, metals, pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs) and other emerging contaminants of concern (ESOCs). BC's OMRR includes criteria on presence of pathogens and metals in biosolids, and establishes the following five categories of biosolids-derived organic matter, differentiated by the process and quality criteria they have to meet, and how the resulting product can be subsequently used:

- Biosolids growing medium
- Class A compost
- Class B compost
- Class A biosolids
- Class B biosolids

A land application plan, prepared by a qualified professional, is required by OMRR prior to application of Class A or B biosolids, or Class B compost on any lands, public or private, agricultural or non-agricultural. The land application plan is to include information such as the following:

- Location, legal and ownership details of the subject property
- Name and address of facility where the biosolids are produced
- Proposed dates of biosolids application
- Soil concentrations of substances before application of biosolids
- Concentrations of substances in biosolids to be applied
- Biosolids application rate as it relates to soil nutrient levels required to establish or sustain plant growth

The land application plan must be submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the local health authority (if on agricultural land or in a watershed used as a permitted water supply) and the Agricultural Land Commission (if on agricultural land) for review and comment. The Ministry of Environment or the local health authority can request changes to the land application plan. A land application plan can also be denied by the local health authority. A land application plan is not required if land application of biosolids is otherwise authorized (i.e., by permit, approval, operational certificate or an order under the *Environmental Management Act*).

In regards to ESOCs, technology to detect these ESOCs has advanced faster than the understanding of their potential impacts to public or environmental health. As stated in the CCMEs 2009 report “Emerging Substances of Concern in Biosolids: Concentrations and effects of Treatment Processes,” “The detection of ESOCs in biosolids does not automatically imply that there is a risk for human health or the environment associated with proper biosolids management.”

Supporting this position are the results of a 2012 study assessing the uptake of various ESOCs into vegetable crops grown in biosolids fertilized soil in Ontario, which found low potential for uptake of these substances under normal farming conditions. A 2019 BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy study also found that ESOCs in sampled biosolids were below European standards. BC’s OMRR does not currently include standards for ESOC presence in biosolids; while standards for these substances are a common theme of consultation feedback, the ministry’s current position is that research to date has not demonstrated a risk to human health or the environment from the extremely small amounts of these compounds which are present in biosolids.

In comparison to other nutrient sources available to agricultural producers, such as manure or chemical fertilizers, land application of biosolids has a more stringent regulatory framework, while providing a similar soil amendment. Schedule B of this report includes a comparison of regulatory, product composition and environmental considerations for biosolids, manure and chemical fertilizers.

Policy Analysis

At the January 13 meeting of the Electoral Areas Services Committee, the following motion was passed:

THAT a report be prepared for a subsequent Electoral Areas Services Committee that describes the regulations and applicable rules and procedures for applying biosolids to public and private lands, both within and outside of the Agricultural Land Reserve, in British Columbia.

In British Columbia, biosolids compost production and land application is regulated by the Organic Matter Recycling Regulation under the *Environmental Management Act*.

Land application of biosolids on ALR land is also regulated by the ALR Use, Subdivision and Procedures Regulation under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*.

Section 552 of the BC *Local Government Act* provides authority to local government to regulate farm businesses in farming areas, which could include imposing further requirements on land application of biosolids.

Schedule A of this report includes further details on BC's Regulatory Framework for Biosolids.

Options

None. This report is for information only.

Financial Factors

Biosolids management in the CVRD is undertaken by the Comox Valley Sewerage Service, which collects and treats wastewater from the Town of Comox and the City of Courtenay, and septage pumped from septic tanks in the CVRD's electoral areas. Annual operating costs for biosolids management (production of SkyRocket Class A compost) are approximately \$500,000.

Legal Factors

The CVRD, as the operator of the Comox Valley Sewerage Service, is required to manage biosolids in accordance with BC's OMRR.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

The information presented in this report relates to the following goals and objectives of the Regional Growth Strategy:

Objective 5-D: Encourage sewage management approaches and technologies that respond to public health needs and maximize existing infrastructure.

Policy 5D-3: Promote eco-industrial development that turns wastes into resources.

Objective 6-D: Increase farming activity in the Comox Valley.

Policy 6D-3: Regularly consult with farmers, farm businesses, and agricultural stakeholders on issues that may impact their ability to productively farm local lands.

Intergovernmental Factors

All levels of government in Canada play a role in biosolids management. General policy direction is provided at a federal level by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment; this policy direction is enacted into regulation by the provinces.

Local governments play a key role in management of biosolids. The *Local Government Act* does provide authority to local government to enact bylaws that could impose additional requirements regarding land application of biosolids on agricultural land. Local governments are often also in the position of being significant generators of biosolids, and are therefore tasked with managing them in accordance with applicable regulations. Costs associated with biosolids management, which can be significant, are also borne by local governments.

In the CVRD, member municipalities also influence biosolids management through their sewer use bylaws that regulate materials permissible for discharge into the sewer system.

Interdepartmental Involvement

This report was prepared by staff in the Engineering Services Branch.

Citizen/Public Relations

Public concern with wastewater management practices is not uncommon, and biosolids management is no exception. Typical public concerns with biosolids land application include the potential for ground and surface water contamination with heavy metals, pharmaceuticals and other emerging contaminants of concern.

Attachments: Appendix A – “Province of BC Biosolids infographic”

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/waste-management/organic-waste/infographic-biosolids_march_2017.pdf

Schedule A – “Province of BC Regulatory Framework for Biosolids”

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/waste-management/organic-waste/biosolids/regulatory_framework.pdf

Schedule B – “Soil amendment and fertilizer comparison, Province of BC”

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/waste-management/organic-waste/biosolids/biosolids-manure-comparison.pdf>