

BIO SOLIDS NEWS

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Amelia's Ray York

Biosolids monitor serves county and state



Ray York

When Manuel Toombs began work this past August as a regional biosolids monitor he was advised by the Virginia Department of Health—which regulates the land application of biosolids in the Commonwealth—to visit Ray York.

York, who has been the biosolids monitor in Amelia County since 2003, is recognized as one of the most knowledgeable local monitors in the Commonwealth and is often called upon by VDH share his experience with new monitors.

“Ray York has been an extremely valuable asset in the coordination of local oversight with VDH regulation of the land application of biosolids in Amelia County and other counties as well,” said Dr. Cal Sawyer, Director of the Division of Wastewater Engineering, which has oversight of the biosolids land application program. “Ray is very knowledgeable concerning biosolids use regulation and has been conscientious in his local monitoring efforts, as well as highly cooperative with our staff.”

The Virginia General Assembly amended the Biosolids Use Regulations in 2003 to provide more local oversight of the land application program. Counties were authorized to

pass a local biosolids ordinance and assign a monitor and to test for environmental impacts. The cost of the local monitoring program is reimbursed to the county by VDH if the county's ordinance is approved by the agency. The funds come from a fee that is assessed on each dry ton of biosolids applied in that county.

“My job,” explained York, “at least this portion of my responsibility, is to make sure the regulations for land application of biosolids are enforced, while being responsive to the Board of Supervisors and the citizens of Amelia when there are concerns. It is my job to protect Amelia's environment.”

While biosolids can be a valuable, reliable and safe resource for farmers, their use can present challenges.

“It's important that folks understand that biosolids are highly regulated and that there are policies in place to protect the environment,” said York. “It's important to me to maintain the integrity of my position as monitor. Part of that responsibility is being a reliable resource on biosolids, or matters of the environment, to the people of Amelia County.”

While his previous experience at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality provides a useful combination of experiences in areas of solid waste management and wastewater treatment operations that enhance an understanding of biosolids management, York believes that the monitoring position requires continuous education and training.

“Training is an essential part of the responsibility of any monitor,” said York. “It takes time to be able to respond to citizens' questions—and there are many—while understanding the regulations and land application requirements. While I'm able to lean on the Health Department and Virginia Tech as resources, I'm still

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The Virginia Biosolids Council supports the land application of biosolids in Virginia through information and education on the beneficial use and safety of biosolids. The Council is supported by municipal wastewater treatment plants, land application companies and biosolids users, and is available as a resource to those who need information about the recycling of biosolids.

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learning and want to continue to learn. I think the citizens expect that.”

In addition to his responsibilities as biosolids monitor, York manages the county landfill, works as a wastewater treatment operator and serves as the county’s Emergency Services liaison.

By providing an immediate and knowledgeable response to individual concerns and complaints about biosolids, York has helped transform a very contentious and politically-charged issue in the county into a results-oriented, cooperative process.

When requested, York will test the well of a resident who is adjacent to a biosolids land application site—before application, immediately after, and then months after application, to assure the resident that the biosolids have no effect on the well. In all cases, no negative effects have been found.

York did find a number of wells, however, that did not meet health standards before biosolids application and was able to help the residents implement VDH-approved well treatment.

He has also tested biosolids for the nine trace elements regulated under EPA Part 503 Rule. In all cases, the elements were well within acceptable levels.

What can Monitors Do?

The Biosolids Fee Guidance Manual, developed by the Virginia Department of Health, provides information for local biosolids monitoring activities. Those include:

- Reviewing permit information related to health and environmental protection issues
- Site monitoring, sample collection and delivery, and examination of records
- Site inspections prior to land application, during and following biosolids application
- Verifying sign notices, buffer distances, site management
- Assessing post application runoff
- Managing records, including data entry, communications, developing reports
- Responding to issues complaints, including contact with the public and state officials
- Collecting samples and testing
- Training

If a locality has adopted an ordinance for testing and monitoring of land application, the local monitor shall have the authority to order the abatement of any violation of state regulations. Such abatement should be requested in consultation with the Department of Health.

“Ray does a great job for us,” said Amelia County Administrator Philip T. Vannoorbeeck. “He is knowledgeable and willing to talk to anybody. He provides insulation to anything associated with biosolids to me and to the Board. We have confidence in his decisions.”

Counties take regional approach to monitoring

Manuel Toombs works as a regional biosolids monitor and reports to four County Administrators and four Boards of Supervisors. He performs his work based on ordinances—all slightly different—approved by each of the Boards in Prince Edward, Buckingham, Charlotte and Lunenburg counties. He maintains an office in Farmville and at his home in Charlotte County.

He works closely with the Virginia Department of Health and local health departments, but is still very actively engaged in learning all that he can about biosolids, even though for the better part of his life he’s been either on or around farms. A former federal worker, he believes firmly in the concept of service—for the residents of the counties in which he serves.

“Somebody being around those counties matters,” he said. “When it comes to biosolids, it’s important there is someone people can go to when they have questions, or if they have concerns,” he said. “I’ll talk to anyone and answer just about any question because it’s important to respond.” He will attend board of supervisor meetings and public hearings when he’s asked, or other public or civic meetings.

“It’s important the wastewater plants and the land application companies know me and what I do, since it’s the environment and the citizens that I have the responsibility to protect.”

Biosolids Monitors in Virginia

According to the Virginia Department of Health, there are 21 counties with approved biosolids ordinances that have appointed local biosolids monitors. A list is available at: www.virginiabiosolids.com



Manuel Toombs



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