



# 2020 Annual Report for Code of Good Practice of the Virginia Biosolids Council

The Virginia Biosolids Council Code of Good Practice has been providing guiding principles to its members for more than a decade. Like anything else, the Code requires constant review and, if appropriate, updating. Our Code received a thorough evaluation in 2020, and that work resulted in what we consider to be valuable and significant amendments.

This annual report is intended to provide a progress report on how the Council's membership performed under our guiding principles. We provide this update annually.

Biosolids are carbon and nutrient-rich material produced during wastewater treatment. Solids and nutrients are recovered from wastewater that would otherwise be discarded and processed into an effective, soil-enhancing product. Recycled biosolids boost crop yields, improve soil quality, and help fight and adapt to climate change by capturing carbon in the soil. Biosolids are an endlessly renewable, safe, reliable resource with multiple benefits — good for people and the planet.

## VIRGINIA BIOSOLIDS COUNCIL

The Council includes representatives of municipal utilities from Virginia and the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area that treat wastewater and produce biosolids and contractors that beneficially recycle biosolids. We exist to educate the public and to provide information on the production, beneficial use and recycling of biosolids. The Council's staff also provides support to its members on regulatory and legislative matters.

Member commitment to a Code of Good Practice requires an ongoing effort to go beyond compliance with the state's extensive regulatory requirements for biosolids. It also addresses the need for social responsibility and transparency to the public. In 2020 we made the following amendments:

- a new fourth guiding commitment to research high-priority trace organics to support development of good policy and regulations protective of public health and the environment;
- new language designed to minimize social impacts and to share technologies and practices;
- new language encouraging our members to engage with diverse communities, citizens and interested stakeholders; and,
- a commitment to advance biosolids knowledge by collaborating with research institutions.

These modifications were unanimously adopted. We are confident that the guiding principles contained in our Code today reflect our commitment to superior environmental performance, critical research, and the health and safety of a diverse public.



## PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

How do you report on a year like 2020? It presented a historic operational environment because of COVID-19. From the very beginning of the pandemic, the commitment of our members to protect public health and the environment never wavered. We learned that our role was more than protecting the environment by cleaning wastewater and recycling biosolids, an endlessly renewable resource. Our sophisticated processes proved essential in monitoring for COVID-19 outbreaks. Many of our members led the way in this testing — Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD) and the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority were among the many utilities and VBC members that continue to routinely monitor for outbreaks. The contractors we use to recycle biosolids adapted, creating work environments that are safe, while ensuring the well-being of the farmers and landowners who choose to recycle biosolids. The practices at our utilities, and the many regulatory requirements and best management practices applied by our members when recycling biosolids, give us confidence that our activities to produce and recycle biosolids — all types of biosolids — are fully protective of health and the environment.

Information on biosolids inspected and complaints collected by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) supplies the Council with measurements of our organization's performance. Provided below is a summary of this information, which is available to the public.

- In 2020, biosolids were applied to 36,168 acres, down from 47,588 acres in 2019. The acreage where biosolids was recycled is less than 1% of all agriculture and forestry land in Virginia<sup>1</sup>.
- In 2020, DEQ conducted 162 inspections on fields where biosolids were recycled, down from 241 inspections in 2019. Council members received three warning letters and did not receive a notice of violation (NOV).
- In 2020, DEQ reported 21 biosolids-related complaints from the public, down from 30 the year prior. The complaints recorded by DEQ were (1) odor related; (2) water related; and (3) track out. None of the complaints reported to DEQ resulted in any regulatory violation.

The Code, while emphasizing outreach, also provides guidance for our operators for the management of their recycling activities. Last year we reported for the first time on the intensity of public involvement and response to mandated notification requirements. Virginia DEQ's biosolids regulations require property owners adjacent to an application site to be notified about the intent to recycle biosolids and notification in advance of any public permit meeting. Our members work with DEQ to address questions or concerns that originate either during a public comment period or at an informational meeting. In 2020, that interaction was virtual.

Since 2017, DEQ has distributed 3,484 notices for public meetings and adjacent landowner notification. The total number of responses resulting from these notifications is 204, or approximately 6% of the notifications resulted in responses. Regulatory activity during this period includes 12 public meetings associated with permits and 22 permit-specific notifications.

## COMMITMENT

Our collective response to COVID-19 reaffirms the responsibility we have to return clean water to the environment, and to produce high-quality biosolids used by farmers and soil blenders, turfgrass growers, tree farmers and cattle farmers, that are critical to protecting public health and safety. The right to clean water, sanitation and a clean environment is a basic human right. The Council's members remain steadfast in our commitment to serving the public and supporting these essentials across Virginia regardless of race, color, geography, national origin, or income.

<sup>1</sup> [Virginia Agriculture Facts and Figures](#)

## THE CODE IN PRACTICE

The Council's membership is committed to steadily improving the quality of the biosolids it produces and to responsibly recycling those biosolids in Virginia.

For instance, in 2020 the Council committed to sponsoring research to better understand the impact of land-applied biosolids on long-term carbon sequestration in soil. We are working with Virginia Tech on this research and are aware of the challenges that climate change presents. The application of biosolids is known to increase soil organic carbon, which underscores the essential importance of this work. Our Code promotes collaboration with research institutions to advance biosolids knowledge.

As a result of the challenges the entire Virginia biosolids community experienced in 2018 and 2019 because of the volume of rain and snow we received, utilities in northern Virginia began meeting last year to research regional emergency storage options and identify opportunities to increase the resilience of the solids processing programs. Our Code promotes continual improvement in product quality and best management practices.

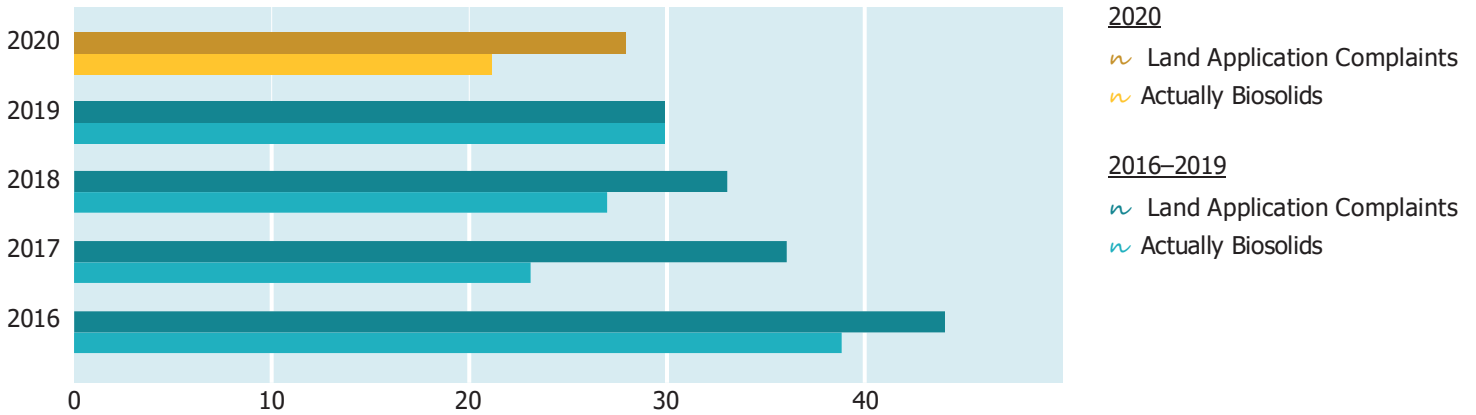
Biosolids application typically benefit cropland and forests; however, it also supports some other commercial interests. Our membership has maintained a long-term relationship with turfgrass growers, who use various types of biosolids to improve soil health. Our Code considers the expanding production of exceptional quality biosolids in Virginia and the opportunity to engage with a variety of stakeholders.

## SUMMARY

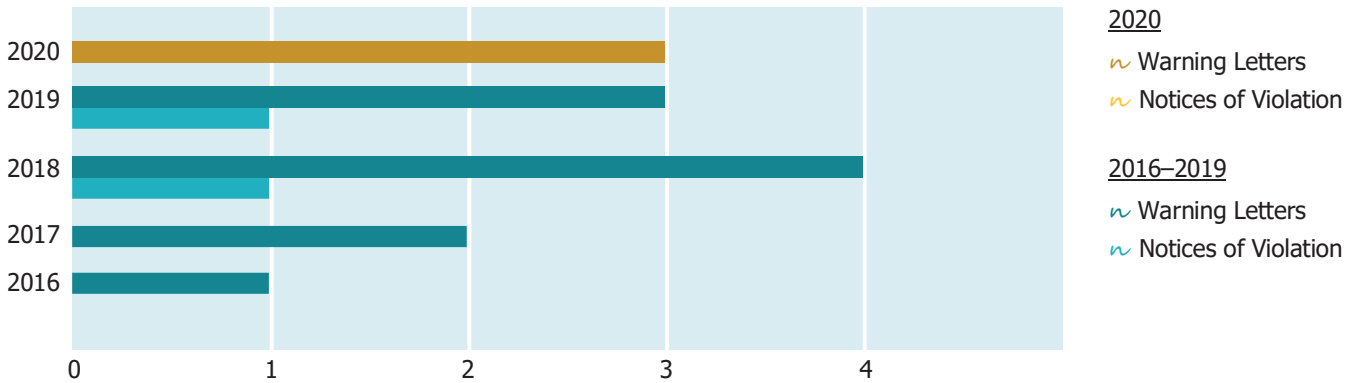
Biosolids recycling is essential to the recovery of valuable nutrients from our wastewater. Its use is highly regulated. Accordingly, we have established and updated our organization's Code of Good Practice, and, by adhering to the guidance, it is our intention to continue to grow public trust and support.



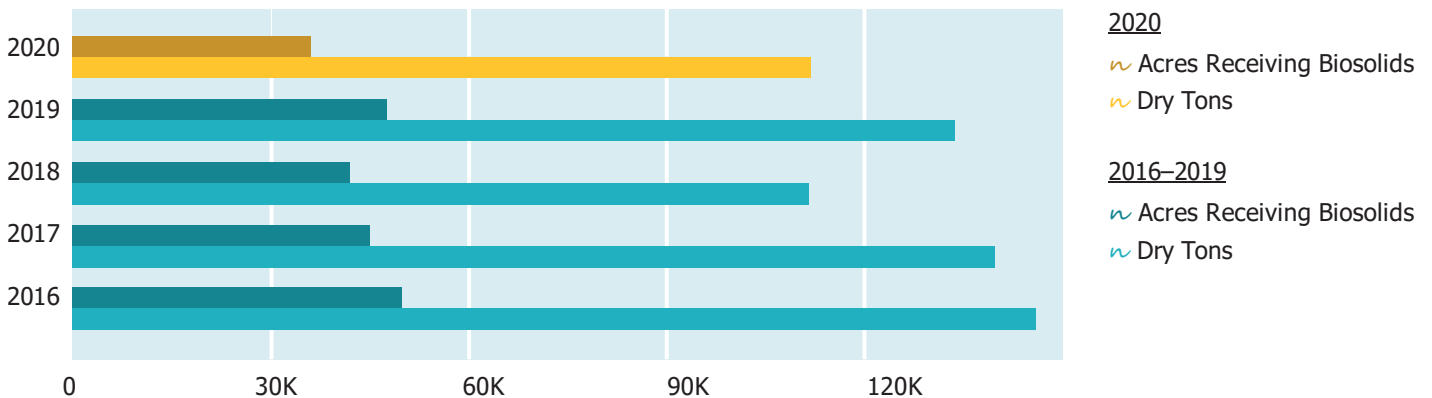
## VIRGINIA BIOSOLIDS COMPLAINTS



## BIOSOLIDS COMPLIANCE



## ACRES RECEIVING BIOSOLIDS



Questions concerning this report can be addressed to [info@virginiabiosolids.com](mailto:info@virginiabiosolids.com).

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