

# BIO SOLIDS NEWS

Information for Virginia Farmers from the Virginia Biosolids Council • June 2005

## Comment period ends July 1

## Proposed phosphorus rules will limit farmers

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) recently proposed amendments to the Nutrient Management Training and Certification Regulation that will require all state-mandated nutrient management plans to address phosphorus. These revised regulations, if approved, will have a major impact on the development of nutrient management plans in Virginia.

Phosphorous application rates as currently proposed will end phosphorus applications at a phosphorus soil saturation level of 65% (50% after 2010), and at soil test levels of "Very High" P-index scores.

This provision, as currently proposed, will have an impact on the land application of biosolids on family farms in Virginia. Many livestock and poultry producers also will be affected if these application rates are enacted. A better solution, and one recommended by Virginia agricultural and biosolids interests, would be to allow phosphorous applications at a rate no less than crop removal.

The proposed regulations would limit wintertime application of nutrients to no more than 30 days prior to planting on "high risk" sites and 60 days for other sites. Current provisions that provide for exceptions would be eliminated. These exceptions are vital because they provide farmers with flexibility due to changing weather and farming practices. Currently, finding adequate farm storage for manure and biosolids is challenging, and there currently exist few options to deal with these surplus materials.

These proposed modifications also impact allowable nutrient applications and modify nitrogen application levels for turf management. According to Katie Kyger of the Agribusiness Council, these proposed changes, if

approved, will have a negative impact on Virginia's very large agricultural community. "Because Virginia's agribusiness industries are interdependent upon one another, the proposed changes will have a greater impact than just on those who are required to have a nutrient management plan or who are subject to the nutrient applications in the Standards and Criteria," she said.

The public comment period will end on July 1.

A copy of the proposed regulations can be found at the following website:

[www.townhall.virginia.gov/Stage/ViewStage.cfm?Stage=3068](http://www.townhall.virginia.gov/Stage/ViewStage.cfm?Stage=3068). Click on "Proposed Text."

Pages 1-48 of the proposed text are the current regulations with the proposed changes noted by underlines or strikeouts.

Pages 49-157 are the Standards & Criteria, a companion document to the regulations (A Table of Contents is on page 50).

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Written comments must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. July 1, 2005 to DCR via the following options:

Mail: David C. Dowling, Regulatory Coordinator  
203 Governor Street, Suite 302  
Richmond, VA 23219

Email: [David.dowling@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:David.dowling@dcr.virginia.gov)

Fax: 804-786-6141

Online:

<http://www.townhall.virginia.gov/Forum/ListComments.cfm?Stage=3068>

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*This newsletter is the first issue of a publication designed to provide Virginia Farmers with factual information about the land application of biosolids. We hope you find it valuable and that you will share this information with your friends and neighbors and your county officials.*

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## What are Biosolids?

Biosolids are nutrient-rich organic materials resulting from the treatment of domestic sewage in a municipal wastewater treatment facility. When treated and processed, these residuals can be recycled and applied as fertilizer to farm land to improve and maintain productive soils and stimulate plant growth.

The term "biosolids" was coined to distinguish this useful byproduct from untreated municipal sewage sludge. While biosolids start out as sewage sludge, they are carefully treated and monitored and must be used in accordance with federal and state regulatory requirements.

Water treatment technology has made our water safer for recreation and seafood harvesting. Thirty years ago, thousands of American cities dumped their raw sewage directly into the nation's rivers, lakes, and bays. Through regulation of this dumping, local governments are now required to treat wastewater and to make the decision whether to recycle biosolids as fertilizer, or to incinerate it or bury it in a landfill. Most municipalities in Virginia and across the nation have decided that recycling biosolids as fertilizer makes more sense than land-

their recyclability and compatibility with the treatment plant process.

Once the wastewater reaches the plant, the sewage goes through physical, chemical and biological processes that clean the wastewater and the resulting solids. The wastewater treatment processes sanitize wastewater solids to control pathogens (disease-causing organisms, such as certain bacteria, viruses and parasites).

## Virginia's Regulatory Program

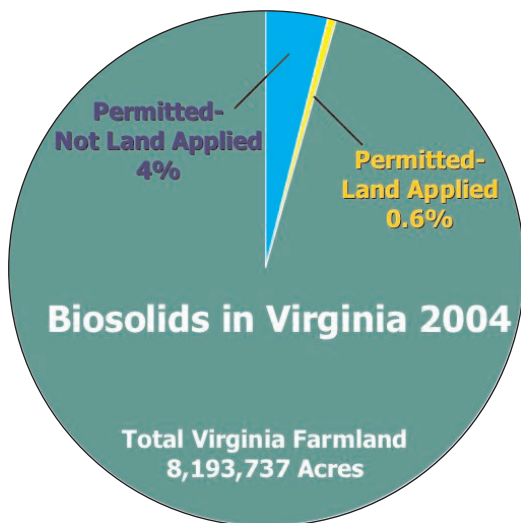
The land application of biosolids was implemented by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency more than 30 years ago to promote the recovery of a valuable nutrient resource from the municipal waste stream. Since then, there have been countless scientific studies supporting the benefits and safety of land application.

Today, Virginia's land application program is a highly regulated, effective and comprehensive effort, controlling every aspect from the generation of biosolids to their beneficial use.

Virginia's biosolids program is administered by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The program is designed to protect Virginia's environment and its citizens.

The regulations in Virginia are continually being modified and refined. In the 2005 General Assembly, several bills were passed affecting biosolids regulations. These included legislation directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study the land application of biosolids and to make recommendations regarding the resources available to VDH to regulate the biosolids land application program. Also approved was legislation to provide a funding mechanism for VDH to reimburse localities for the costs of training local biosolids monitors.

To see the full Biosolids Use Regulations in Virginia, visit the Department of Health, Division of Wastewater Engineering website at <http://www.vdh.state.va.us>.



In 2004, there were 380,775 acres permitted to receive biosolids in Virginia, with only about 50,000 acres actually receiving biosolids application. With more than 8 million acres of farmland in Virginia, that means that less than one percent of available farmland received biosolids.

filling or incineration, which both create other environmental concerns.

The treatment of biosolids can actually begin before the wastewater reaches the sewage treatment plant. In most larger wastewater treatment systems, industrial facilities are required to pre-treat their wastewater to remove many hazardous contaminants before it is sent to a wastewater treatment plant. Wastewater treatment facilities monitor incoming wastewater streams to ensure



*Dedicated to environmental stewardship  
and biosolids recycling.*

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