



2021 Annual Report for Code of Good Practice of the Virginia Biosolids Council

The Virginia Biosolids Council (VBC) Code of Good Practice has been providing guiding principles to its members for more than a decade. This annual report provides a progress report on how the Council's membership — all of its members — performed under these guiding principles. This update is provided annually.

VIRGINIA BIOSOLIDS COUNCIL

The Council's membership includes representatives of municipal utilities in Virginia and metropolitan facilities in Washington and Maryland that beneficially recycle biosolids in Virginia. Municipal facilities treat wastewater and produce biosolids which are recycled and beneficially reused by contractors. Our organization was established to educate the public and to provide information on the production, beneficial use and recycling of biosolids.

Member commitment to our Code of Good Practice requires an ongoing effort to go beyond compliance with Virginia's extensive regulatory requirements for biosolids. It also addresses the need for social responsibility and transparency to the public. Most recent modifications to our Code include a commitment to research high-priority trace organics and to support the development of good policy and regulations; to minimize social impacts and to share technologies and practices; and to engage with diverse communities, citizens and interested stakeholders.

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. When 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.



PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

As we moved into 2021, times demanded that our members be flexible and adaptable. COVID-19 continued to create operational challenges; however, the responsibility of our municipalities and contractors to protect public health is ever-present. The production of biosolids following their extensive treatment never stops. Biosolids are an endless renewable resource.

In the annual report last year many of our members became leaders in monitoring for COVID-19 outbreaks. Since the 2020 report was published, the Virginia Department of Health is now participating in a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cooperative agreement to implement enhanced surveillance of COVID-19 in wastewater to augment other COVID-19 surveillance data. This is an important tool to continue to combat COVID-19.

Our organization observed the Code of Good Practice in the following ways in 2021:


- Engaged in a research project with Virginia Tech to better understand how carbon is captured in biosolids
- Engaged with the Virginia Soil Health Coalition
- Advanced the organization's outreach through universally accessible social media platforms
- Engaged with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regularly regarding research activities on trace organics
- Participated in all Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in-person and virtual biosolids information meetings
- Provided information and education on biosolids at the State Fair of Virginia, Virginia Small Grains Field Day and Ag Expo

Information on biosolids inspections and complaints collected by the 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 2021, biosolids were applied to 37,197 acres, an increase from 36,168 acres in 2020. The acreage where biosolids was recycled is less than 1% of all agriculture and forestry land in Virginia.¹
- In 2021, DEQ conducted 170 inspections on fields where biosolids were recycled, a modest increase in inspections conducted in 2020. The inspections remain low as compared to 2018–19 due to staffing and COVID-19 considerations. Council members received three warning letters and did not receive a Notice of Violation (NOV) last year.
- In 2021, VBC members conducted more than 2,750 activities in the field and operated 307 days on more than 1,590 separate fields.
- In 2021, DEQ reported only 18 biosolids-related complaints from the public, down from 28 the previous year. The primary complaints recorded by DEQ were odor related and track out. None of the complaints reported to DEQ resulted in any regulatory violation.

Virginia DEQ's biosolids regulations require property owners adjacent to or nearby an application site to be notified about the intent to recycle biosolids and to be notified 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.

¹ [Virginia Agriculture Facts and Figures](#)



In 2021, there were seven public meetings. Five of those meetings were conducted virtually as required by Governor Ralph Northam's Executive Order 53. In addition to newspaper and website public notices, DEQ notified 603 adjacent property owners by mail regarding these informational meetings. DEQ received 19 responses and 22 people (4% of the property owners) attended these informational meetings. DEQ processed 18 permits in 2021.

Since 2017, DEQ has distributed more than 4,000 notices for public meetings and adjacent landowner notifications. The total number of responses resulting from these notifications is less than 7% of the total number of notifications delivered. Regulatory activity during this timeframe includes 46 permit-specific notifications.

COMMITMENT

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

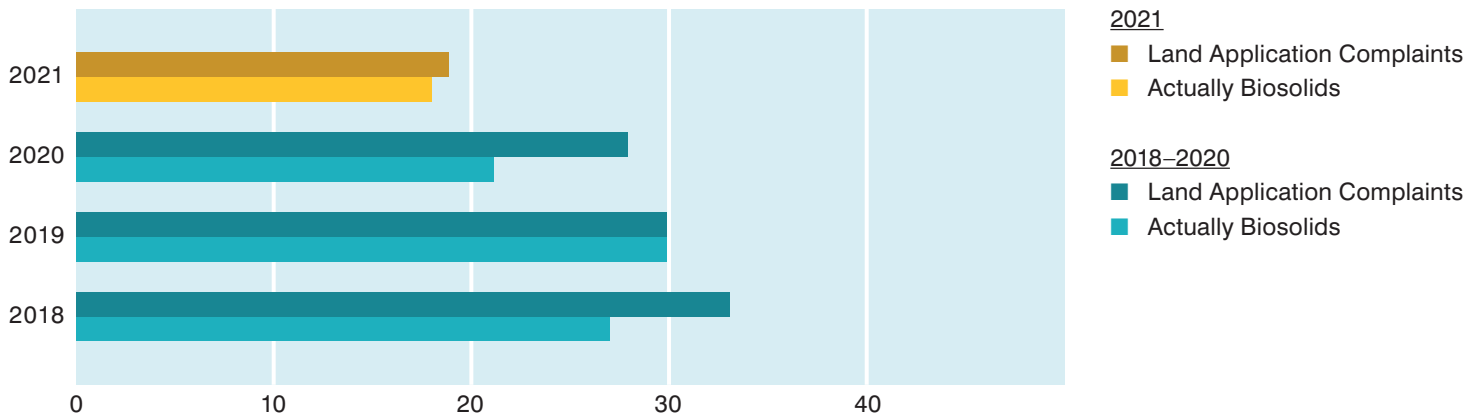
SUMMARY

Biosolids recycling is essential to the recovery of valuable nutrients from our wastewater. Its use is highly regulated. Accordingly, our members are focused on adhering to the guidelines we have established to ensure that when we generate or recycle biosolids, we protect the goodwill and equity our membership has worked so hard to develop.

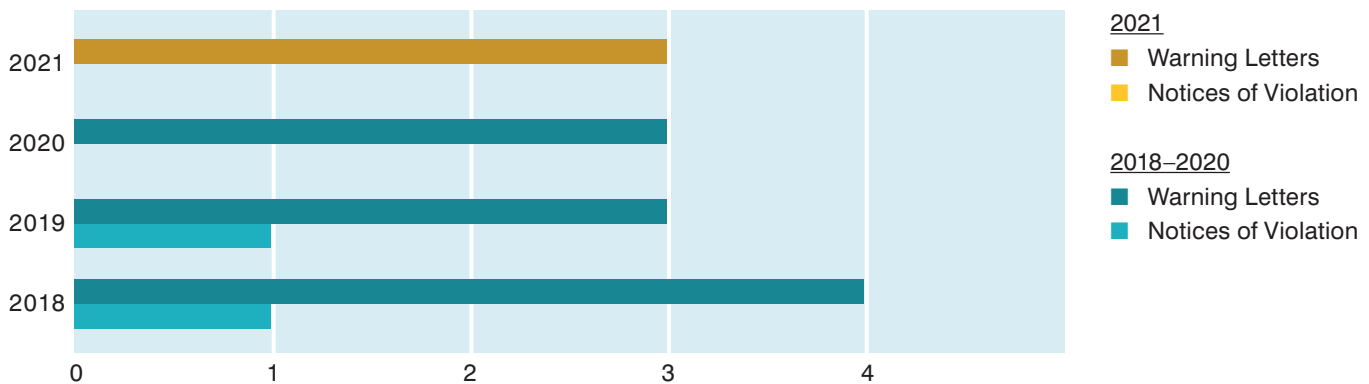


Questions concerning this report can be addressed to info@virginiabiosolids.com.

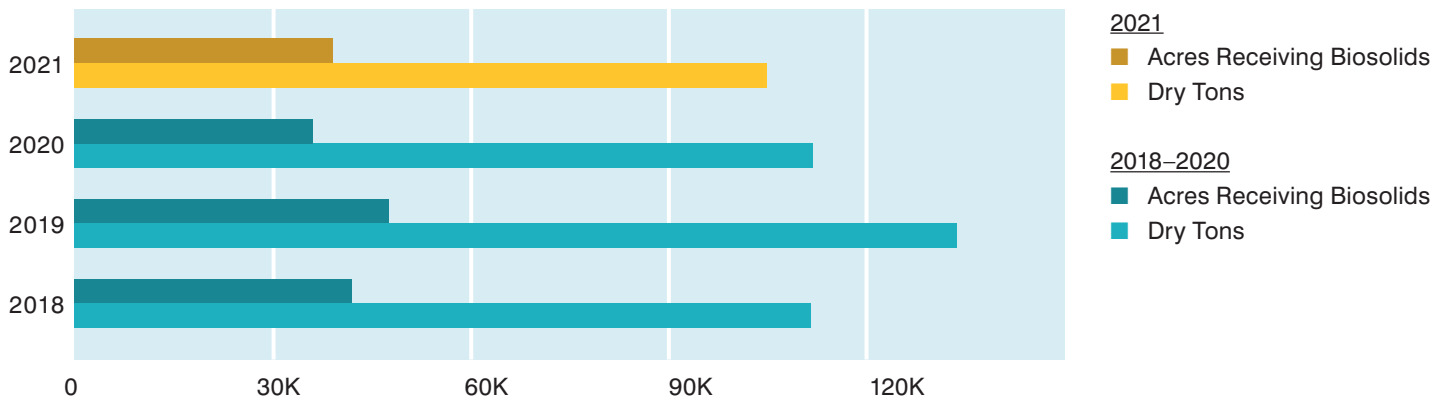
VIRGINIA BIOSOLIDS COMPLAINTS



BIOSOLIDS COMPLIANCE



ACRES RECEIVING BIOSOLIDS



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