

An On-Going Dilemma

Asking Permission from Local Regulators to Compost Horse Manure

Let me start by saying that our primary objective in designing all O₂Compost Systems is to protect surface water and ground water resources. With our compost systems, we are effectively isolating the raw mix of materials and preventing adverse impacts to the environment.

It is also our goal to significantly reduce odors, flies and rodents in and around the compost pile and to improve the overall aesthetics of the manure handling area. In all cases, our compost systems qualify as “Best Management Practices (BMP’s)”.

It is therefore extremely frustrating for all concerned when local regulators layer on additional requirements which, as it turns out, dissuade or prevent our clients from implementing an easy solution to their manure management problem.

Case in Point

Earlier this year, a client in Wisconsin contacted the La Crosse County Department of Land Conservation to inquire if permits would be required to set up an O₂Compost System for her 10 horses. Her question, as well intended as it might have been, threw her into a bureaucratic “do-loop” which ultimately prevented her from setting up her compost system.

Here are the details of what she was required to do:

Animal Waste Impoundment Permit Application

1. Complete a permit application and pay a fee of \$100
2. Obtain certification from a registered Professional Engineer that her construction plans meet department requirements.
3. Submit a “management assessment, site assessment, design capacity, structural details and calculations, and an operation and maintenance plan.
4. Submit a site plan, drawn to scale showing property boundaries, impoundment location, intermittent streams, wetland, and water bodies within 500 feet, ...
5. Provide construction and structural details, including all grades, dimensions, cross-sections, concrete thickness, ...
6. Include soil test pits and detailed soil descriptions to depths of at least 5-feet ...
7. Construction and material specifications ...
8. Provisions for drainage and control of runoff ...
9. Time schedules for construction.

10. Provide descriptions of the methods for transferring animal waste into and from the storage facility.
11. Describe provisions for impoundment abandonment.
12. After construction, submit as-built plans within 30-days of completion.

Additionally, she was required to submit a Manure Management Plan that included: 1) annotated aerial photographs of the site; 2) soil samples and lab analyses for every pasture; 3) field by field information re: crops and application rates; and 4) additional information including animal types, estimated manure production, manure spreader capacity, etc.

To fulfill all of the permit requirements, she would have had to hire a farm planner at a significant expense and expose her farm to the unending scrutiny of County Regulators.

The Outcome

The irony is that she abandoned her plans to compost and is now spreading raw manure on her pastures and a neighbor's farm ground.

My Recommendation

As a registered Professional Engineer myself, I'm torn between: 1) satisfying the letter of the law, and 2) sidestepping these agency-driven obstacles and doing what's ultimately the right thing for the environment.

When it comes to permits, my suggestion is this: "Don't Ask - Don't Tell".

Can you identify the location of this O₂Compost System?



Composting in China

In September of this year, Peter Moon, founder and President of O₂Compost, was asked to become a “Foreign Expert” to teach the principles of composting to the Beijing Hydraulic Research Institute (BHRI). Peter is one of several Foreign Experts - the others are working on such topics as incineration of municipal solid waste for energy recovery, electrification of automobiles, wetland restoration and stream enhancement, and software architecture and design.

Peter is currently working on pilot test project to compost 80 tons of biosolids (solid residuals from wastewater treatment) and teach the Aerated Static Pile Method of Composting. Using the results of this pilot project, he will then help design and construct a full scale compost facility located on the outskirts of Beijing and provide assistance with system start-up, full scale operation and compost utilization.

The goal is to then design and construct similar compost facilities at other locations around Beijing and other major cities in China that can benefit tremendously by converting an “organic waste problem” into “natural resource opportunity”.