factsheet

organic pollutants

Are Dioxins and PCBs in sludge a problem for biosolids use in agriculture?

The very tight environmental controls now imposed on manufacturing processes, have resulted in reduced emissions of dioxins, furans, PAHs (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons), PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and other organic compounds. As a result we have seen very significant reductions in the amounts present in sewage sludges over the past 10 to 20 years (Up to 80% reduction for some categories of compounds). *(Water UK)*

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) announced on the 17th October 2003 that it has made a final decision not to regulate dioxins in land applied biosolids. After five years of study, including outside peer review, the Agency has determined that the potential for dioxins from this source is so low that no significant risk to human health or the environment is posed. *(Water UK)*

Michael Payne, NFU advisor on Sludge Issues said, "As far as I am aware no significant risk has yet been found after working through quite a few substances". Danish Studies, for example suggest that organic contaminants unlike heavy metals, do not build up in the soil, nor do they pass into the crop.

The Government considers the controlled application of sewage sludge to agricultural land "the best practicable environmental option in most circumstances". The NFU believes spreading treated sewage sludge, or biosolids, is a perfectly sensible and sustainable use of resources.

All agricultural applications of biosolids are monitored and controlled by the Environment Agency and recycling contractors work within the Safe Sludge Matrix. *(Water UK)*.

The Anglian Water nutri-bio products must be 100% compliant with the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations and all treatment processes are subject to HACCP (Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points) protocols.

Further details on dioxins may be obtained from the USEPA website at:
www.epa.gov/opptintr/pbt/dioxins.htm.

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