

Update with Ecology

March 15, 2022

11 a.m.

Present: Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, Commissioner Grose, County Manager Erik Martin, State Department of Ecology Southwest Regional Office (SWRO) Section Manager Peter Lyon, Southwest Region Biosolids Coordinator Shawnte Greenway, JP Anderson, Lara McRea, Lee Napier, John Abplanalp, Austin Majors

Guests: Sen. John Braun, Rep. Peter Abbarno, Rep. Ed Orcutt, Ruth Peterson, Larry Buck, Nic Scott, Pat Saldana, Richard Honour, Steven Krager, Sharon Layton, Tom Layton, Frank Corbin, Darlene Schanfald, Lynnette Hoffman, and various other members of the public and press

Recorder: Rieva Lester

State Department of Ecology Southwest Regional Office (SWRO) Section Manager Peter Lyon and Southwest Region Biosolids Coordinator Shawnte Greenway provided the following information:

- Biosolids are the byproduct of wastewater treatment.
- Wastewater treatment plants are required to test biosolids quarterly.
- Ecology issues Class A biosolids permits and regulates Class B applications. Class A biosolids can be used anywhere.
- Class B biosolids have had 99 percent plus of pathogens removed.
- Biosolids are characterized using tests pathogens, pollutants and stability (how odorous it is).
- Class B can only be applied on permitted sites, whereas Class A biosolids can be applied anywhere.
- EPA has done giant risk assessments and re-evaluate every few years.
- Biosolids are treated to reduce pathogens.
- Wastewater treatment facilities test for the concentration of fecal coliform.
- Treatment plants test for stability, the number of pathogens and pollutants.
- University of Washington has released studies regarding birth control, Prozac and other contaminants that could be included in biosolids.
- Contaminants in biosolids are miniscule, and research indicates they don't present a risk to humans.
- Lands must be tested prior to biosolids application.
- Chemicals that are present break down into less-potent chemicals. Other compounds do not appear to be formed.
- EPA and several universities, including the University of Washington, have done comprehensive toxicology studies on biosolids.
- Property owners are responsible for testing their own properties and their own wells. Buffers are established to negate effects on neighboring properties.

- Applicants must indicate the rate at which they plan to apply biosolids and the frequency at which they plan to apply biosolids.
- Ecology will sometimes ask the applicant to perform sampling – such as nitrate sampling – prior to approval and sometimes asks for follow-up monitoring the levels in subsequent years.
- Ecology views the use of biosolids as an agricultural activity.
- Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are compounds that may not ever break down. They can be found in cookware, fast food containers, carpet, couches, etc. Researchers are developing tests regarding PFAS in biosolids.
- Ecology issues a Determination of Nonsignificance because there is nothing showing that the application of biosolids is a safe activity.
- Pathogens are even more reduced in Class A biosolids than in Class B biosolids.
- Wastewater treatment plants in the Lewis County area sell their biosolids to landscapers and farmers. Ecology does not regulate the distribution of the Class A biosolids. Ecology maintains records that show that the various treatment plants have treated the biosolids to ensure the Class A requirements have been met.
- A treatment facility that cannot meet the Class A requirements often will test for Class B requirements as a failsafe. If a facility fails to meet the Class A requirements, it must prove that it met the Class B requirements.
- Entities that spread Class A biosolids are not required to indicate that they are applying Class A biosolids.
- In 2020, biosolids locally came from treatment plants in Toledo, Mossyrock, Morton, Vader and Pe Ell. Some have lagoons, while others grind the material.
- 50 dry tons of biosolids that originated in Mossyrock were applied locally in 2020.
- The company that submitted the application for Toledo could have gotten the biosolids from anywhere.
- Biosolids can be spread on all crops. The use of biosolids affects when the crop can be harvested. The wait time for potatoes would be much longer than hay.
- Biosolids cannot be spread on organic fields. The USDA is the entity that does not allow the use of biosolids on organic fields.
- All humans produce biosolids, and many landfills choose not to accept biosolids.

Commissioner Swope cited a University of North Carolina study that purported to find that 75 percent of people living near farms that spread biosolids experienced health issues like burning eyes, nausea, vomiting, boils and rashes, while others have contracted MRSA, a penicillin-resistant “superbug.”

Shawnte said the study was merely a survey of neighboring property owners, not a thorough study.

Commissioner Pollock discussed concerns regarding transient exposure. Peter said Ecology reached out to the state veterinarian, who indicated there are no studies linking biosolids to hoof rot.

Shawnte discussed federal minimum requirements for buffers.

Peter said the addition of biosolids improve topsoil better.

Peter noted that the Layton Prairie applicant has withdrawn their application.

Meeting ended at 12:06 p.m.