



FACT SHEET

Agency Response to the National Research Council Report on Biosolids Applied to Land and the Results of the Review of Existing Sewage Sludge Regulations

EPA seeks comment on a planned strategy explaining the Agency's response to the recommendations in the July 2002 National Research Council report entitled "Biosolids Applied to Land: Advancing Standards and Practices." The strategy is an important step in setting new priorities for the sewage sludge (also known as biosolids) program. EPA also requests comment on the results of its review of existing sewage sludge regulations required under the Clean Water Act to identify additional toxic pollutants that may need to be regulated. A Federal Register notice explains the rationale for both the planned strategy and provides the results of EPA's preliminary review of existing sewage sludge regulations.

Purpose of the Federal Register Announcement

The purpose of the *Federal Register* notice is to provide the public with EPA's plans to respond to the NRC report and provide results to date of the review of existing sewage sludge regulations and to seek public comment.

National Research Council (NRC) Report

Over the past decade, citizens and environmental organizations questioned the adequacy of the chemical and pathogen standards for protecting human health. To address these concerns and fulfill the CWA requirement to reassess the sewage sludge regulations every two years, the Agency commissioned the NRC of the National Academy of Sciences to independently review the scientific basis of the regulations governing the land application of sewage sludge.

The NRC completed an 18-month study and published "*Biosolids Applied to Land: Advancing Standards and Practices*" in July 2002. The NRC concluded that while there is no documented scientific evidence that sewage sludge regulations have failed to protect public health, there is persistent uncertainty on possible adverse health effects. The NRC report contains about 60 recommendations for addressing public health concerns, scientific uncertainties, and data gaps in the science underlying the sewage sludge standards. The NRC noted that because sufficient data may be available to fully address their recommendations, further research is needed.

The Agency completed its review of the NRC study and seeks public comment on a planned multi-year strategy that has three main objectives:

- update the scientific basis of the rule by conducting research in priority areas
- strengthen the sewage sludge program by incorporating results of completed, ongoing, and planned research activities both within and outside EPA, and
- continue ongoing efforts to increase partnerships and communication with the public and other stakeholders

To efficiently handle the many broad-ranging recommendations in the report, EPA organized the strategy into these eight categories:

- Survey of Chemicals and Pathogens in Land-Applied Sewage Sludge
- Exposure Assessment
- Risk Assessment
- Methods Development
- Pathogens
- Human Health Studies
- Regulatory Activities
- Biosolids Management

Review of Existing Sewage Sludge Regulations

The CWA requires EPA to review the sewage sludge regulations every two years to identify additional toxic pollutants in sewage sludge, if any, that may need to be regulated. The Federal Register notice summarizes EPA's review and solicits comment on the preliminary results.

To date, EPA has not identified any additional pollutants for possible regulatory action. EPA will be conducting further analyses to ascertain whether there are additional toxic pollutants in sewage sludge that may need to be regulated. After public comment, EPA will publish specific pollutants for possible regulation in a *Federal Register* notice in early 2004.

How to Get Additional Information

To review the NRC report ("*Biosolids Applied to Land: Advancing Standards and Practices*") or get more information on sewage sludge, you can visit the Internet at <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/biosolids/> or contact Agnes Ortiz at (202)566-1303 or Alan B. Rubin at (202)566-1125.