



Association of
Metropolitan
Sewerage Agencies

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Ken Kirk

August 7, 2001

Letters to the Editor
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20071

Re: Letter to the Editor on the Aug. 6 Article Titled "Health Fears over Sludge Spur Quest for Controls".

As Executive Director of the Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies (AMSA), the largest representative of the nation's public wastewater treatment facilities, I feel it is critical to respond to your article on the front page of the Aug. 6 *Metro Section*, entitled "Health Fears Over Sludge Spur Quest for Controls." The article made a significant, indeed, glaring omission in its failure to recognize the critical steps being taken by municipal officials to protect the safety and health of their workers and the general public.

Land application of treated sewage sludge, or biosolids, has been a safe and environmentally sustainable management tool for wastewater treatment agencies for decades, and has been subject to close federal and state regulatory scrutiny. In addition to a formidable regulatory structure, innovative environmental management systems (EMSs) are increasingly used to ensure public accountability in handling biosolids management issues.

Biosolids are a valuable resource for soil conditioning and crop fertilization, and offer farmers an effective alternative to commercial, chemical fertilizer. Currently, nearly half of the biosolids produced in the United States are land applied on agricultural land and reclamation sites.

Critically, the regulations governing biosolids management were developed over a ten-year period with the active involvement of numerous federal, as well as state regulatory agency officials and eminent independent scientists from across the United States. Data collected from hundreds of research studies and operating projects were reviewed during the risk assessment effort that served as the technical basis of the regulations. In 1996, the National

Research Council concluded that current technology to remove pollutants from wastewater, coupled with the existing regulations governing the use of reclaimed wastewater and sludge in crop production, are adequate to protect human health and the environment.

Although federal, state, and local regulations ensure that land-applied biosolids pose no health threat to the public, the fact that biosolids are derived from human waste complicates efforts to gain broad public acceptance of beneficial reuse. Given the concerns with land application that many stakeholders have expressed, wastewater treatment officials across the nation are dedicating their agencies to reaching beyond regulatory compliance by creating and implementing comprehensive environmental management systems (EMS).

The EMS standard for excellence for biosolids has been under development since 1997 and currently is in the demonstration stage in dozens of communities across the country. The EMS for biosolids engages community stakeholders and the public in advancing environmentally sound and accepted biosolids management practices. Not only are communications with neighbors improved, but the general public also gains a better understanding of the wastewater treatment process and has a voice in the management of their community's treated sewage sludge. The goals of the EMS are to exceed regulatory standards, ensure protection of public health, and achieve environmental excellence.

Wastewater treatment agencies are municipal officials dedicated to the environmental welfare and public health of the communities they serve and the nation. They collectively treat and reclaim over 18 billion gallons of wastewater each day and their Herculean efforts to ensure the environmentally safe and beneficial use of sludge is no exception.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K Kirk". The "K" is large and stylized, followed by "Kirk" in a cursive script.

Ken Kirk
Executive Director

Ken Kirk
Executive Director
Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies
Home Address & Phone:
7311 Brookville Rd; Chevy Chase, MD 20815
301-986-5576
Work Address and Phone
1816 Jefferson Pl., NW, Washington, DC 20036
202-833-4653
kkirk@amsa-cleanwater.org