



# The United Sludge-Free Alliance

## Sludge Basics

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The issue of land application of sewage sludge and the serious impact this practice has on the health and safety of America's communities, food and water supply is of growing concern throughout the country. In Pennsylvania the most sludged counties are Berks, Lancaster and York but, regardless of where you live, your food is grown on farmland that can legally apply sewage sludge as a 'fertilizer'. Your water supply does not recognize land property boundaries and is susceptible to surface run-off into waterways, wells and aquifer contamination.

Sewage sludge is everything that goes down the drain of every home, industry, business and hospital where it is treated at the waste water treatment plant. After the water is squeezed from the waste, the remaining solids, called sewage sludge or biosolids, are treated with heat and chemicals. Ocean dumping of sewage sludge was banned in 1989 because it was killing the oceans and US municipalities were faced with the challenge of finding an inexpensive way to dispose of the millions of tons of waste produced annually. But heavy metals and toxic waste do not disappear because they are heated and squeezed. On the contrary, the blending of heavy metals with the volatile mix of chemicals, pharmaceuticals and pathogens is now causing dangerous problems in our communities, as well as the land and water we rely on to feed America. Ultimately, pouring known toxic waste on our farmlands compromises the soil and water we rely on and endangers America now and in the future.

Consider these alarming facts:

- The EPA's 503 rule is intended to regulate the use of sludge, but imposes few restrictions. It requires testing for only 9 heavy metals and establishes arbitrary, untested acceptable rates higher than those accepted in other parts of the world.
- In 2000, the EPA's Inspector General stated that the 503's regulations were insufficient and, due to lack of oversight and data, the EPA cannot assure the public that current land application practices are protective of human health.

- In 2002, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences warned that the underpinning of the 503s was based on outdated or nonexistent science. Warnings included concerns that the unpredictable waste mixtures and standard risk management would not protect human health.
- Several deaths and extreme health related issue have plagued communities where sewage sludge is applied. Two of the deaths associated with sludge application have been in Pennsylvania. Health issues include digestion problems, breathing related problems such as asthma and persistent infections including MRSA.
- Although untested for human safety, sewage sludge has been tested for the heavy metal and toxin uptake in the plants and animals that we consume. Cornell Waste Management Institute, NY has presented concise, scientific research that shows cause for alarm including the passage of known carcinogens like dioxin through the animal feed into the animal's meat and milk that we consume.
- Losses to farmers of crops, livestock and livelihood have been linked to sewage sludge use. In 2008, McElmurray VS. USDA, the loss of land and livestock after several decades of 'safe' sludge devastated an entire family farm. Who will feed America when we have made poisoning our food and water legal?

In light of the disturbing history of the EPA's focus on protecting policy rather than the health and safety of Americans, we invite you to investigate this issue and consider the true science, which is not funded by the sludge industry. As the federal agency charged with protecting the environment, the EPA needs to implement increasingly stringent regulations on the use of sewage sludge until land application is completely phased out.

We invite you to take this opportunity to recognize that throughout the world, sewage sludge has been used as an alternative fuel source for over 50 years. We recognize the need to break our addiction on foreign oil, while at the same time search for a clean, renewable fuel source. In countries throughout Europe, including Sweden and Germany, sewage sludge has fulfilled this goal while disposing of their modern waste.

Researching and funding ways to convert sewage sludge into useful fuel products like methane, Syngas, Biofuel, Biochar and building materials must be seriously implemented. By transforming the technologies available for converting sludge to alternative fuel, we will reward real scientific study and investigate sustainable ways to dispose of our modern sewage sludge waste. Communities and cities that are investing in alternative uses of sewage sludge include Entertech Gas

Company in Rialto, California, Schmack Bioenergy in Cleveland, Ohio and DTE Energy in Mt. Clemens, Michigan.

Unfortunately, sewage sludge has been a political football. It is time to reevaluate this issue and move to protect the people of America, not the policies. Please check our website at [www.usludgefree.org](http://www.usludgefree.org) for a warehouse of information including articles, scientific studies and community concerns about the health and safety of sewage sludge applied to our food, water and communities. Sign up for our email updates. Get involved!

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