



# The United Sludge-Free Alliance

## Home and Garden Risks

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### The Basics – From the Flush to Your Family

What is sewage sludge and how does it affect your home and community?

Are you using sewage sludge in your home garden? Is sludge used to “fertilize” your local parks, playgrounds and golf courses?

Sewage sludge is the concentration of everything that goes down the drain of homes, businesses, industries and hospitals after water is extracted at the wastewater treatment plant. Everything. After the water is extracted from the waste, the toxic chemicals, pathogens, bacteria, pharmaceuticals and poisons are concentrated into a solid or semi-solid form that is promoted as a “fertilizer option” called biosolids or sludge.

Because levels of nutrients can be found in the sludge/biosolids byproduct, it is promoted as a cheap or free fertilizer. More than 8 million tons of America’s sewage sludge is land applied on farms and as a fertilizer on parks, playgrounds, golf courses and sold to home gardeners at municipalities, garden centers or as a bagged “fertilizer”. Sludge contains an ever changing mixture of known and unknown hazardous waste, depending on what goes down the drain at any given time or at any given location including pathogenic bacteria, viruses, protozoa and parasites. Promoting sludge as a fertilizer is an inexpensive way to dispose of the hazardous waste created by our modern society. It is naïve to think that we can grow our food in toxic waste and produce a healthy and safe product. It is naïve to think that we can surround our homes and communities with toxic waste without paying the final price of our health and quality of life both long term and short term.

The minimal regulations set by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for land application of sludge requires testing for only nine heavy metals out of the thousands of toxic chemicals, pathogens, bacteria, medications, pharmaceuticals and poisons found in our waste. These tests determine if the sludge can be marketed as Class A, Class B or must be sent to another disposal site, like a landfill. Salmonella or E. coli are tested for as “indicator” pathogens, with the theory that if you stabilize either of these elements, you will have stabilized or controlled other pathogens. Testing is required for either “indicator” not both. For instance, high levels of Salmonella are permitted in sewage sludge and considered “safe” if low levels of E. coli exist. Certainly, many pathogens survive and are stronger than the “indicator” pathogens yet do not require testing, such as MRSA, AIDS and H1N1. Although found in wastewater and sewage sludge, no pharmaceuticals or hormones require testing.

The sludge industry or hauler administers the “quality” test once a month to once a year, depending on the size of the wastewater treatment facility. The industry/hauler maintains the records and is not required to report test findings – in other words, there are no checks and balances. The EPA’s own testing has found over 145 known toxins in every sample of nationally tested sewage sludge.

The wastewater treatment industry, municipalities and the EPA, encourage public acceptance of this waste by using terms like “organic”, “beneficial”, “compost” or “nutrient rich.” After the Federation of Sewage Works Association changed its name in the late 1980’s to the Water Environment Federation, the industry also flooded the public image with marketing efforts, including their industry magazine “Biocycle.” But once the natural human feces and food waste is blended with the hazardous waste from our hospitals, industries and businesses, it cannot be cleaned and purified easily, if at all. Wastewater treatment plants were never intended to create fertilizer. By greenwashing toxic waste with user-friendly terms or minimizing the real dangers by using false, industry funded “science”, our society has avoided funding real solutions to dispose of our waste. In reality, no one is protecting America’s health and safety from the concerns of sewage sludge in our food, water and communities.