



NORTHWEST BIOSOLIDS MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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September 10, 2002

W-99-18 NODA Comment Clerk, Water Docket (MC-1401), USEPA
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Northwest Biosolids Management Association (NBMA) would like to thank you for this opportunity to comment on Standards For The Use Or Disposal Of Sewage Sludge: Notice of data availability. The NBMA is a group of publicly owned treatment works and private companies in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska and British Columbia, dedicated to advancing environmentally sound management of biosolids in the Pacific Northwest. Since the group's inception in 1987, total membership has grown to more than 200 agencies and companies.

The NBMA commends EPA on a well-organized and informative document explaining the new dioxin data and the revised risk assessment. The use of the probabilistic risk assessment method rather than a deterministic approach to establish numeric limits for dioxin in land-applied biosolids is commendable. In addition, recognition of the updated World Health Organization (Van den Berg et al., 1998) scheme for dioxin-like compounds to establish relative compound toxicity is laudable. Dioxin data from EPA's 2001 National Sewage Sludge Survey and its improved and updated risk analysis contain will be very useful in the Agency's determination of possible revisions to existing Part 503, Subpart B regulations governing the use of land applied biosolids.

EPA's finding that establishing a numerical limit for biosolids dioxin makes no detectable difference in cancer risk to the highly exposed farm family cannot be understated. We commend the Agency for conducting a screening ecological risk analysis to assess potential adverse impacts the 29 dioxin congeners would have on mammal and bird receptors, particularly with respect to the effect that land applied biosolids activities may have where solids are topically distributed over pasture (This method of biosolids land application is widely used as a means of solids recycling in the Pacific Northwest). Screening results strongly suggest biosolids land application actions will not adversely impact targeted wildlife species considered. These findings coupled with EPA's estimated five million-dollar price tag of imposing a numerical limit should preclude the Agency from further considering this option (Note, one NBMA member, the City of Portland, Oregon, advises that landfill tipping fees projected by EPA grossly underestimated. Portland would have to expend more than three million dollars more annually than it currently costs the City for biosolids land application if solids were directed to a regional RCRA subtitle D facility.). Wastewater utilities are under considerable financial strain. They face mounting

costs facing new CMOM, SSO, CSO, TMDL, and other costly issues. Treatment works cannot afford to spend resources that do not measurably contribute to bettering the lives and health of our ratepayers, customers and other stakeholders.

The NODA concludes biosolids dioxin levels remain relatively consistent over time, on a month-to-month basis, and that overall, biosolids dioxin levels appear to be decreasing with time. In addition, the greatest variability appeared to be in the facilities with the highest dioxin concentrations. These observations suggest that frequent monitoring of dioxin levels is probably unnecessary. We suggest that EPA invest its resources in coordinating a voluntary monitoring program. Facilities with likelihood or a history of high dioxin levels should be encouraged to monitor and investigate the sources of high dioxin levels. EPA's role would be to maintain technical expertise in testing and investigating sources of dioxin.

There does not seem to be any justification for treating small treatment works different than large treatment works with regard to numerical limits or monitoring given that no measurable health benefit can be derived through imposition of numerical limits. There may be justification for providing expertise or low interest loans to small communities to conduct initial dioxin monitoring and follow up investigation if high concentrations of dioxin in biosolids are found.

The NBMA supports EPA's commitment to assist communities in identifying sources with elevated biosolids dioxin levels. We suggest that the source assessment methodology be applied in a stepwise fashion. Step 1 should focus on the identification of potential sources of dioxin in the collection/services area. If elevated levels of dioxin are found, then step 2 should be monitoring of the biosolids and comparison of the biosolids dioxin congener "finger print" to the "finger print" of known sources of dioxin. Step 3 would be the elimination of dioxin sources.

The NBMA has recently completed a voluntary dioxin survey of biosolids produced by its members (survey results are available upon request). This survey confirms that dioxin concentrations in biosolids in the northwest are similar to those found in the EPA 2001 dioxin survey and the AMSA 2000/2002 dioxin survey. In addition the NBMA survey included some preliminary "finger printing" in attempt to identify sources of dioxin. Of the 22 samples analyzed, six had dioxin concentrations greater than 30 ppt TEQ. Five of these samples had fingerprints consistent with sources containing PCB dielectrics and one consistent with pentochlorophenol. The majority of biosolids samples had dioxin congener fingerprints consistent with combustion-derived sources to storm water. Combustion derived sources are difficult to control making opportunities for significant reduction in dioxin concentrations minimal, particularly where treatment facilities are connected to combined sewers in areas where soils, topography, and climate favor erosion. It appears that lower levels of dioxin are generally derived from difficult to control non-point sources of dioxin. This is further justification for monitoring only cases where there is an identifiable potential source of dioxin.

The data and revised risk assessment presented in the NODA make a clear case that further regulation of dioxin in land applied biosolids will be unlikely to produce a detectable change in lifetime cancer risk even to the highly exposed individual using conservative assumptions. A dioxin numerical limit would be a waste of public funds. We encourage EPA to pursue a voluntary monitoring program targeted at facilities that either have elevated levels of dioxin or have industries or other sources that might produce elevated levels of dioxin.

Sincerely,

Roberta King, President
Northwest Biosolids Management Association

cc: Dave Hufford, City of Tacoma - Regulations Development Committee Co-chair
Mark Ronayne, City of Portland - Regulations Development Committee Co-chair
Dan Thompson, City of Everett - Regulations Development Committee Co-chair