



## SUCCESSFUL COMPOSTING: Community Relations

### Defining the Issue

The effects of a compost facility's relationships with neighbouring and co-operating residents and businesses should **never** be underestimated. Unless your facility is in a very isolated location, community relations will play a critical role in its continuing success, and there are many things you can do to build these positive relationships.

### Key Concepts

Community relations surrounding a compost plant are rarely neutral. Waste management facilities of all types find this a challenging part of operations, and poor relations, once established, can be difficult to overcome. For this reason a positive relationship between facility staff and those who live close to, work around, and contribute to the facility's operations is a very worthwhile goal. Actively working to develop a solid base of positive community relations involves a commitment of effort and resources, but good relationships will pay back this investment many times over. It truly does pay to make friends before you need them!

#### Why you want your community to LOVE you

- They may be your suppliers of source-separated residuals. If your process involves accepting materials from community residents or businesses, you are dependent on their commitment to and skill in separating compostable materials from undesirable ones. The more informed they are about the requirements of your process, and the more excited they are about your facility and product, the more effective their separation is likely to be.

- They may have to deal with an increase of activity in the area, whether trucks on the road or composting operations releasing dust or odours. They are much more likely to be tolerant if you have taken the time to make sure they have been included in the development process, as suggested below.
- They may be a significant potential market for your finished product, depending on your marketing strategy. They are much more likely to purchase a product they have contributed to and feel pride in when it comes from a facility they feel they can trust.

### **Community Relations Opportunities**

Some examples of opportunities to build positive community relations include:

#### **COMMUNITY MEETINGS**

- ❑ Particularly effective when planning a new facility or a significant change in operations
- ❑ Provide an opportunity for neighbouring residents and businesses to obtain accurate information from you first-hand rather than relying on less direct sources. Also provide a forum for their questions and concerns to be heard and addressed.
- ❑ Provide an initial educational opportunity for your potential neighbourhood co-operators: as people understand a proposed operation and feel comfortable with the individuals responsible for managing it, they are more likely to support the plan themselves. This can result in more enthusiastic participation and increased tolerance of possible glitches during the operation's initial stages.
- ❑ Can serve as a source of very relevant information for your facility development team on local issues and conditions.

- Help to establish a precedent for openness and responsibility on the part of facility operators by demonstrating good faith in moving to include neighbours who may be affected in the initial stages of the process.
- Can be a time to establish a system of contact with your facility where people can register complaints or concerns and know they will be addressed.

#### FACILITY TOURS

- Can provide an excellent educational and public relations opportunity:
  - Extend special invitations to key community members to attend a special demonstration/tour event. Possibilities could include the mayor and council members, school board officials, environmental officers, and members of local environmental associations [see *Community Relations* in Useful Tools]. Make sure the experience is positive, informative, and enjoyable.

- Many schools now have active “Green” programs in place to increase students’ awareness of environmental issues by taking on a variety of educational and practical projects. Highlighting the waste diversion and nutrient recycling your facility provides can mesh very well with teachers’ objectives.
- The more clearly members of the public understand the requirements of your process, the more effective source separation of organics is likely to be. This can certainly include school children, who have been shown to exert considerable influence on their family’s disposal patterns.
- psychological research has shown that people’s reactions to an odour can be influenced by their understanding of the odour’s source [see *Odour Reduction* in Useful Tools]. Visitors who have been given an opportunity to understand and appreciate your process and challenges are more likely to be tolerant of occasional odour concerns, provided they feel reassured that the odours are harmless.

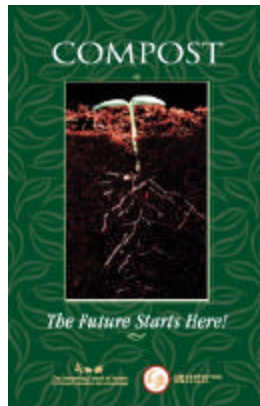
#### DEMONSTRATION GARDENS

- If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the effect of actually seeing the difference between soil amended with your compost and regular local soil can be dramatic! Garden plots set up side by side and planted with the same assortment of vegetable and flowers can provide a powerful demonstration of the effect compost has on plant growth.



### COMPOST AWARENESS WEEK

- This Canadian initiative has become an annual international promotion of the benefits of composting and compost use [see *Compost Awareness Week* in Useful Tools]. Tap into the excitement of this event by joining facilities across Canada and beyond in raising awareness of composting. Many operators plan media events, launch new collection or separation programs, sponsor “kick-offs” to Plant a Row • Grow a Row, involve EcoClubs from local schools in grounds beautification projects, offer special prices on compost sales, and conduct educational campaigns on appropriate sorting of compostable materials. The possibilities are unlimited!



### PLANT A ROW • GROW A ROW

- This exciting initiative links gardeners with the efforts of their local Food Bank: residents plant extra produce as part of their garden and then contribute the harvested vegetables directly to the Food Bank. Thousands of pounds of fresh produce have found their way to needy Canadians through this excellent initiative. Some compost facilities have chosen to support this effort by providing free compost to gardeners who register to participate in Plant a Row • Grow a Row.



### COMMUNITY GARDENS

- ❑ Community gardens, either private or municipally managed, can provide a highly-visible option for positive input. Co-operative support can be offered in such forms as free compost, informational material, on-site workshops on the benefits of compost, composting methods and compost use, and an organized collection of Plant a Row • Grow a Row contributions.

### COMPLAINT/INFORMATION HOTLINE

- ❑ An informative, friendly service to answer citizens' concerns can be a significant investment in educating and reassuring the public.

### COMMUNITY "FREE DROP OFF" DAYS

- ❑ If your facility usually charges a tipping fee for residential yard waste dropped off by private citizens, advertise specific seasonal days when your neighbours can drop off their spring and fall yard clean up material free of charge.

### COMPOST SAMPLES

- ❑ Can provide residents an opportunity to try compost out in their own yards, encouraging them to invest in a larger amount for the next growing season.

### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Participate in neighbourhood initiatives such as road “adoption” programs, civic beautification projects, and charity fundraisers.

## **Useful Tools:**

Odour Reduction: <http://www.jgpress.com/BCArticles/2002/010229.html>

Compost Awareness Week: [http://www.compost.org/caw2002\\_intro.html](http://www.compost.org/caw2002_intro.html)

Plant a Row • Grow a Row: <http://www.compost.org/growarowintro.html>

Community Relations: [http://www.compost.org/wdo\\_cr\\_nf.html](http://www.compost.org/wdo_cr_nf.html)

Complaints from Neighbours (*On-Farm Composting Handbook*):

<http://www.recycle.com/compost/otherprob.html#anchorcomplaints>

## **Additional Informational Links:**

US Composting Council: <http://compostingcouncil.org/index.cfm>

Cornell Composting: [http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/Composting\\_homepage.html](http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/Composting_homepage.html)

US Environmental Protection Agency Composting: <http://www.epa.gov/compost/>

The Composting Association of the UK: [http://www.compost.org.uk/dsp\\_home.cfm](http://www.compost.org.uk/dsp_home.cfm)

Washington State University Compost Connection: <http://csanr.wsu.edu/compost/>

Compost Education and Resources for Western Agriculture:

<http://www2.aste.usu.edu/compost/>

Recycling and Composting Online: <http://www.recycle.cc/>

## **Feedback:**

Are you an operator who has had experiences—faced particular challenges, solved specific problems—that would be of help to other operators? To share tips or solutions your facility has developed with regards to the subjects in this fact sheet, please click on the button below. Thanks for sharing your practical ingenuity!

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