

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League Statement on the Management of Sewage Sludge

The League calls for the development and implementation of measures to prevent harmful chemicals from contaminating our drinking water, food and environment via wastewater effluent discharges and land application of sewage sludge. Until a safer alternative is found, we advocate for better enforcement of existing regulations and greater oversight by local governments.

The League supports the banning and/or reduction of certain chemicals at the source, additional testing for and removal of specific chemicals, and the development and implementation of prescription drug take-back programs.

The League does not support landfilling or incineration of sewage sludge. Landfilling merely takes the waste from one community and transfers it to another—toxins and pathogens are still present. Often landfills are unjustly located in poor communities and communities of color who already bear the much of the burden of our wasteful society. The incineration of sewage sludge is a shell game—taking toxins from the sludge and dispersing them through air emissions, water discharge, and the disposal of toxic ash. During incineration, toxins can become more concentrated and can also recombine and form even more deadly poisons. Dioxin is created during incineration. As with landfills, sewage sludge incinerators are often located in vulnerable communities. Neither landfilling nor incineration encourages source separation, additional testing or stronger regulation.

As a stopgap measure, the League feels that the responsibility and the liability for sewage sludge should be squarely in the hands of local government—not transported “away”. The sewage sludge should be located on property owned by local government and safely fenced with appropriate signage. Runoff must be controlled. Groundwater monitoring wells should be installed and monitored at appropriate intervals in order to evaluate the potential for groundwater contamination. These results are to be made available to the public. In taking responsibility for the management of sewage residues, government must ensure that poor communities and communities of color are not targeted for disposal sites.

Sludge residuals should be prohibited from use on land or crops intended for pasture, or as feed for animals. The use of sewage sludge as fertilizer must be prohibited- in mulch, compost, or any other form. Any product which contains sewage sludge must be plainly labeled; not only that it contains sewage sludge, but also with the contaminants that may be present in the product.