



## Local

Treated compost not same as sludge, maker stresses

Karl B. Hille, The Examiner

2008-04-30 07:00:00.0

Current rank: # 391 of 6,763

### BALTIMORE -

Reports confusing Orgro Class A compost with sewage sludge irk compost makers.

"It's really frustrating," said [John Myers](#), a consultant for the Curtis Bay Orgro Composting Facility. "We've already had customers who have called us who are concerned about the compost they are receiving and want clarification on the stories they have heard about the compost."

The blend of human and industrial waste, mixed with wood chips and ash, is treated at more than 130 degrees for at least three days. That kills E. coli, salmonella, cryptosporidium and a host of other bacteria found in the raw material, sludge, the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) says.

In a span of three months, the compost goes through the heating and decomposition process twice, once indoors and once in a covered yard, to satisfy EPA testing requirements. It is then sifted, with larger wood chips returned to the pile to be recycled at Orgro's facility, which produces 60,000 to 70,000 cubic yards of compost a year.

By contrast, Class B sewage sludge is treated to reduce — not eliminate — pathogens that have been blamed for illnesses.

Incoming sludge, stored in underground tanks at the facility, clumps like wet clay. Orgro is a dry soil with small chips of wood that hold water and continue to decompose over time, Myers said.

The EPA routinely tests both the incoming sludge and the final product for harmful bacteria and heavy metals.

Compost is a safe, biologically rich topsoil spread in gardens, lawns and landscaping, Myers said. "There has never been a circumstance when our incoming sludge ever exceeded regulations for heavy metals," he added. "We don't come within 10 to 20 percent of EPA limits, typically."

But [Glenn Ross](#), a community activist in East Baltimore, questioned a Johns Hopkins study in which Orgro was spread on nine yards in largely poor urban communities as a part of an experiment to reduce lead levels in soil.

"Researchers need to make available what was the process in purifying it," Ross said.

[Lucille Gorham](#) has used Orgro for years and never noticed any bad health effects. Gorham, the former chairwoman of the [Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition](#), said it was the fertilizer of choice for community gardens and beautification efforts in her neighborhood.

Myers doesn't see why the Hopkins study, completed in 2002, should be a concern today.

"We make some of the highest-quality compost in the country here in [Baltimore](#)," he said. "Our finished product is Orgro, and it's a compost that we are very proud of."

[khille@baltimoreexaminer.com](mailto:khille@baltimoreexaminer.com)

*Examiner*  
INCLUDED