

A Message from the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA)

RE: Herbicide residues in compost – A reminder for compost facilities

WHAT are we seeing?

We've recently seen compost in both Washington and Oregon test positive for clopyralid. Clopyralid and herbicides in the same chemical family show up every few years. These persistent herbicides leave residues in compost that damage sensitive garden plants, like beans, peas, sunflowers, and tomatoes.

WHY is this happening?

Herbicides such as clopyralid are legally and legitimately used to control broadleaf weeds in many agricultural crops such as cereal grains and grass hay. However, the herbicide residue can persist in the plant material. Feeding the grain, or using straw or hay from treated crops causes the herbicide to pass through the animal in manure, or get into the animals' waste bedding. Using the waste bedding and manure to make compost means that compost may still contain the persistent herbicide, which can damage sensitive plants.

WHAT should I do?

If you make compost using agricultural wastes or mushroom substrate, make sure you test or perform a bioassay on the compost before delivering it to customers. Follow Washington State University's (WSU) guidance on conducting bioassays:

https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/411/2014/12/PDF_Clopyralid_Bioassay.pdf. WSU also has several in-depth publications on herbicides in compost: <https://puyallup.wsu.edu/soils/clopyralid/>.

Also, educate compost users. Compost is a soil amendment, not a planting medium. Compost blended with soil will be less likely to damage plants, even if herbicides are present because soil microbes help break down herbicide residues.

WHO can provide more information?

- Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), Pesticide Management Division Compliance Program Manager, Tim Schultz at tschultz@agr.wa.gov or 509-994-0936.
- Washington State Department of Ecology Solid Waste Services Organics Specialist, Mary Harrington, at mhar461@ecy.wa.gov or (360) 407-6915.

WSDA is working with the Oregon State Department of Agriculture to identify compost feedstocks that may have been treated with clopyralid. Please share with compost facilities and those that may provide materials for use in compost.