

PPC: X

EPA: 530-R-96-002A

NTIS: SUB-9224-96-001

1. Frequently Asked Questions on Composting

Does composting constitute source reduction or recycling in EPA's hierarchy of solid waste management?

Composting organic wastes after they are transported to a centralized municipal composting facility is a waste management activity characteristic of recycling. Composting organic waste at the point of generation such as in the yard of a home is a form of source reduction, since no formal waste management activity occurs (Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste in the United States, 1994 Update, November 1994).

Must a centralized municipal solid waste composting facility obtain a permit before the facility may begin composting operations?

Although the federal regulations do not specifically address composting facilities, many individual state or county agencies have established permitting procedures to operate centralized solid waste composting facilities. States may require facilities to submit the following information: details of facility design, operating plans, description of incoming materials, monitoring plans, potential environmental releases, and potential markets for final compost product (Decision-Makers Guide to Solid Waste Management, Volume II, August 1995).

What markets are available for compost product material?

Many markets are available for composted material including the agricultural industry, the landscape industry, the nursery industry, public agencies, and residential property owners. New research and field work has also begun to open markets for tailored compost material in the commercial bioremediation industry to clean up contaminants in soil, water, and air. The quality of compost products and the demand for compost products will vary according to regional land and climate characteristics. As such, a centralized municipal compost facility should identify potential markets early and cater to those markets needs. For more information about compost markets refer to Markets for Compost (November 1993).

What percentage of yard trimmings are recycled in centralized municipal compost piles?

EPA has estimated that 32.8 million tons of yard trimmings were generated in 1993. Approximately 19.8 percent (or 6.5 million tons) of the 1993 quantity of

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yard trimmings were managed in centralized municipal compost facilities (Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste in the United States, 1994 Update, November, 1994). Many yard trimmings are also managed in backyard compost heaps. Since 1988, private and public compost facilities have increased from about 700 to 3,100 in 1994.