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8/22/22

## **Compost Facility in Massachusetts Implicated in PFAS Contamination**

The Boston Globe reported back in early July on the discovery of elevated levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) impacting 218 properties adjacent to the 240 acre Mass Natural Fertilizer Company site in Westminister, Massachusetts. The PFAS contamination was originally discovered through private well testing.

According to *The Globe* article, the property where Mass Natural operates is owned by Otter Farm, a subsidiary of Seaman Paper. According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)'s Energy & Environmental Affairs Data Portal ([Energy & Environmental Affairs Data Portal \(state.ma.us\)](#)), Mass Natural was sent a Unilateral Administrative Order (UAO) back on May 17th which required Mass Natural to cease sales of all compost materials and do additional testing. On July 20th, the DEP issued a second UAO, this time suspending the facility's Recycling, Composting or Conversion (RCC) permit indefinitely. The UAO cited exceedances of the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP) limits for PFAS in soil and groundwater.

Mass Natural is not on the MassDEP's list of facilities with an Application of Suitability (AOS) permit. However, the facility has an approved Sampling and Analysis Plan for Land Application of residuals dating back to July 2005 which is typically associated with the Beneficial Use Determination (BUD) program under MassDEP's solid waste program. According to the *Globe* article, the facility was permitted to take up to 90,000 tons of organic materials annually including sources from paper residuals, refuse/food waste, and wastewater solids although there are limited records of wastewater solids going to that facility, according to sources at the MassDEP.

The *Globe* reporter did not mention specific results from groundwater or compost testing and the PFAS in the compost is probably from sources several decades old at this point. The July UAO suspending Mass Natural Fertilizer's permit identifies the business and property owners as "potentially responsible parties" to the PFAS contamination and requires them to take remedial actions.

Long-time BioCycle contributor Dr. Sally Brown, was motivated to write an opinion piece for BioCycle titled "When There Is More To The PFAS Story" following a series of articles in *The Globe*. She was critical of its reporting on this and other stories about PFAS:

"Two recent articles in the *Boston Globe* have helped to fan the flames. The Globe is generally considered a good and solid source of information. From a PFAS perspective, however, it would seem that clicks rather than well-resourced and balanced information is what they are after."

NEBRA wrote several letters to the editor of *The Globe* with a similar theme:

"The recent article by David Abel titled "When organic is toxic: How a composting facility likely spread massive amounts of 'forever chemicals' across one town in Massachusetts" is a heartbreaking story. EPA's new proposed health advisory limits for PFAS in the parts per

*quadrillion* shows just how “wicked” a problem PFAS is. The *Globe* reporting, however, lacks perspective on the risk of exposure from these industrially-contaminated sites versus what we are exposed to every day as background in our environment. The article will likely incite some hysteria; maybe that was the intent. A wider angle is needed in reporting on the PFAS problem and putting all our various risks of exposure into context. This [InfoGraphic](#) provides some perspective on PFAS concentrations in various products, including composts.”

With background levels of PFAS in all media including soils and rain waters, the need to communicate about sources into and relative risk of PFAS exposure from biosolids, residuals, composts and wastewater continues to abound. NEBRA and others have developed materials for its members to use to convey relative PFAS risks for the general public audience — see NEBRA member pages, [Reg-Leg Committee — NEBRA \(nebiosolids.org\)](#). Check out the Media and Public Relations Guide prepared by the Maine Water Utilities Association: [PowerPoint Presentation \(mwua.org\)](#). For a great website about PFAS — and specifically PFAS in biosolids — check out NEBRA Member Madison Metropolitan Sewer District ([Home - Madison Sewer District PFAS Initiative \(madsewerpfasinitiative.org\)](#)), a good example of how to talk to the public about PFAS. It is now more critical than ever!

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