

A Work of Ort

(Ort is a scrap of food left after a meal)

Home composting has become more commonplace throughout the country. But how may people have the opportunity to compost at work?

Collecting food scraps from hundreds of people in an office building and managing them on-site can be a challenge.

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) employees, however, rose to this challenge in September 1997 when they began to compost food scraps from the DEP headquarters building in Hartford.

As part of a source reduction and pollution prevention initiative, over 900 DEP employees are asked to separate their food scraps into specially marked buckets provided in each of six lunch rooms. At the end of every day, the compost buckets are emptied into an institutional-size compost bin located in back of the building. One hundred employee volunteers (nick-named "organic mechanics") had been taking turns performing this function until 2001, but it is now part of the building's cleaning contract. Each morning, the compost is "turned" by volunteers, making sure that the food scraps are mixed with the wood shavings that are used as a source of carbon. Because the composter is powered by electricity that rotates a large steel-bladed mixing auger, this task only takes about 10 minutes to complete. Every six months, the compost is ready to harvest. Volunteers use wheelbarrows and shovels

to screen the compost as it comes out of the composter. The compost is still quite hot at this point (+100°F) and is taken to another DEP facility in Portland to cure. Once stabilized, the finished compost is used in planting beds at state parks and other DEP facilities.

Data was collected during the first four years of operation by volunteers weighing each bucket before it was dumped into the compost bin. Now the emptying task is included in the building's maintenance contract and is performed by the cleaning staff. The buckets are no longer weighed, but getting the emptying task put into the cleaning contract was an important step in making the food scrap collection a part of building maintenance procedures.

Based on the data collected, an average of 31.5 pounds of food scraps per day is being recycled. To date, the DEP has diverted 44,648 pounds of food scraps from the Hartford trash burning plant through this program. This has produced 15.8 cubic yards of compost that has been used at Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill, Talcott Mountain State Park in Simsbury, Gillette Castle in East Haddam, and in the plantings in front of the DEP Headquarters in Hartford. For more information, contact the project coordinator, K.C. Alexander at the DEP Recycling Program (860) 424-3239 or kathy.alexander@po.state.ct.us ■



A DEP employee throws her orange peel into the lunch room bucket.



A wheelbarrow full of finished compost.



The DEP Headquarters' plantings thrive with compost.

“Organic”

What’s in a Name?

There’s no doubt about it. Big chain grocery stores and small specialty markets are listening to consumer demands for organic products. **Many people want to eat organic foods for health reasons, but organic agriculture creates less pollution and has other significant environmental benefits as well.** (See sidebar)



More and more food products - from “soup to nuts” - are labeled organic. But what does that label really mean? People tend to think organic foods are those that are grown without the use of pesticides. While this is true, the federal government has developed new labeling laws that create standards for what can be called organic.

The new National Organic Program (NOP) regulations require that organic products that come from farms with organic sales above \$5,000 must be certified by an organization accredited by the USDA. The NOP regulations also require an organic plan for caring for the soil and prohibit genetic engineering, radiation, and sewage sludge in organic production and handling. A penalty up to \$10,000 can be levied on any person who violates these regulations.

The new labeling standards refer to the percentage of organic ingredients in the product:

- “100 percent organic” means the product contains only organically produced ingredients.
- “Organic” means the product has at least 95% organically produced ingredients.
- Products meeting the requirements for “100 percent organic” and “organic” may display the USDA Organic seal.



- “Made with organic ingredients” means the product contains at least 70% organic ingredients and the label can list up to three of the organic ingredients or food groups on the label. The USDA seal cannot be used anywhere on the package.
- If the product contains less than 70% organic ingredients, the term “organic” can’t be used, even though organic ingredients can be listed.

So, if you are interested in eating organic foods you can at least be certain that across the nation, organic means the same thing. For more information on the standards, go to the NOP website at www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm.

Remember, transporting food to the market causes pollution and depending on how far the products have traveled, it may sometimes negate the environmental benefits of organic agriculture. So, always try to buy locally grown, organic food whenever possible. If you are interested in information on organic farms in Connecticut, contact the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) at (203) 888-5146 or go to their website at www.ctnofa.org. ■

Organic Agriculture

- **Eliminates the risk** of pesticide-contaminated water sources and improves soil health.
- **Can reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by locking more carbon in the soil rather than releasing it into the atmosphere, as what happens in conventional agriculture.
- **May contribute to the survival** of populations of songbirds, bees, fish, bald eagles, and wetlands species that have been hurt by chemicals in the environment.
- **Avoids the use of hormones and antibiotics** often fed to animals on conventional farms.
- **Limits the occupational and non-occupational harm to humans**, such as cancers and a broad range of birth defects and reproductive problems that can result from exposure to pesticides.

SOURCES:
www.ota.com/organic/environment/environmental.html
and www.theorganicreport.com/pages/80_choosing.cfm

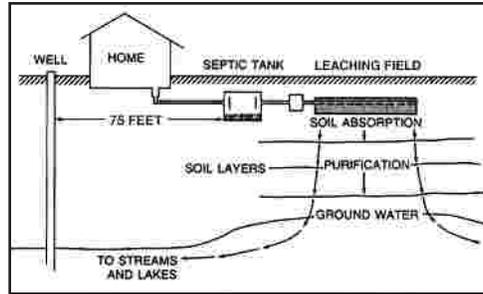
Don't Flush and Forget

Would you buy an expensive car and never change the oil? Or would you use your vacuum cleaner for twenty years without emptying the bag? Of course not!! But many homeowners never think about maintaining their septic tank until the system fails and they see or smell sewage bubbling up in the yard or flooding the basement. Proper maintenance will protect the value of your home and save you from the hassles of a failed system.

A home septic system is essentially an individual treatment facility for the household's wastewater, which is often referred to as sewage. Septic systems are used where municipal or regional treatment facilities are not accessible by sewer lines, usually in rural and suburban locations.

A typical septic system treats the household's sewage, temporarily holding it in the septic tank where heavy solids and lighter scum are allowed to separate from the wastewater. The solids and scum remain in the tank and are partially decomposed by bacteria. Wastewater ("effluent") leaves the tank and flows into a distribution box that directs the effluent into the drainage system, sometimes referred to as the "leaching field". Usually a network of perforated pipes in trenches, the drainage system disperses the effluent into the surrounding natural soils. The effluent is purified by the soil's organisms, thus protecting groundwater and in turn, public health and the environment.

In order to prolong the life of your septic system, the accumulated solids at the bottom of the tank along with the lighter scum should be pumped out every two to five years by a licensed firm. **If not removed, the solids will eventually overflow, accumulate in the drainage system and clog up the soil's pores (openings) – no longer allowing the effluent to flow into the soil.** Sewage will then back up into your house or bubble up in your yard. If this happens, you may



A Typical Household Septic System

need to construct a new drainage system on a different part of your lot, which can be quite expensive.

Other ways to avoid trouble with your septic system is to avoid pouring cooking grease or fats down the drain. Grease hardens in the tank and accumulates until it clogs the inlet or outlet pipe. Garbage disposals are not recommended for houses with septic systems because their use significantly increases the amount of solids and greases entering the tank, resulting in the need for more frequent pumping.

Paints, pesticides, poisons and other household chemicals should not be dumped down the drain since they may kill soil microorganisms that help purify the sewage. There is no need to use commercial septic tank additives. Some of these products contain chemicals that may damage your drainage system or contaminate the groundwater.

For more tips on how to avoid trouble with your septic system, call the CT DEP Office of Pollution Prevention at (860) 424-3297 and ask for the free guide on **"Septic Care and Maintenance for the Homeowner"** or visit www.conservect.org/septic_care.htm. **For more information on septic systems**, visit www.dph.state.ct.us (type "septic tank" in the search block) or contact your local health department. To verify that a septic tank cleaning service has a license, call the CT Dept. of Public Health at (860) 509-7603. ■

WHAT'S NEW IN P2?

VOC Free Paint for Sikorsky Helicopters A Pollution Prevention Case study

The CT DEP has a case study available that details a new environmentally-preferable paint in use by a Connecticut manufacturer.

Sikorsky has delivered a new helicopter to the Navy with paint formulated without any hazardous air pollutants (HAPs) or volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs contribute to ground-level ozone (smog), which damages lungs and degrades many materials.

This new paint has passed performance trials under actual military operating conditions and has become the new standard helicopter paint. The previous paint contained four chemicals targeted by the federal Environmental Protection Agency for reduction or elimination whenever possible. The new topcoat has performed up to the standards of the Navy and it is seen as a more environmentally friendly material. It is virtually impossible to tell the difference between the old VOC/HAP topcoat and the new water-borne topcoat. This was noticed when four aircraft were situated in a line and the zero-VOC coated aircraft was virtually indistinguishable from the other three.

Copies of this case study are available by calling the DEP Office of Pollution Prevention at (860) 424-3297 or it may be viewed and downloaded from the internet at: www.dep.state.ct.us/wst/p2/index.htm Click on the "Business/Industry" link to see the entire list of available case studies of Connecticut companies.

P 2 C A L E N D A R

A S E L E C T I O N O F P 2 R E L A T E D E V E N T S

JUNE 22, 2003



Organic Farm Tour, Eastern CT

A tour of four organic farms in eastern Connecticut. Tickets cost \$30.00 and include an organic luncheon with locally grown organic foods. Pre-registration is required. For more information, call the CT NOFA office at (203) 888-5146 or visit www.ctnofa.org.

JUNE – OCTOBER 2003



Bicycle to Work Breakfasts: Old State House, Hartford

Every last Friday of each month through October, bicycling commuters can get a free breakfast and register for prizes. CT DEP volunteers are staffing the June 27th breakfast. Other sponsors include the Capitol Region Council of Governments, American Lung Association, CT Departments of Public Health and Transportation, ALL ABOARD!, CT Sierra Club and CT Bicycle Coalition. For more information and to connect with others who commute by bicycle in your area, visit www.crcog.org or contact Sandy Fry, CRCOG, at (860) 522-2217.

P2 Lecture Series

DEP sponsors a monthly lecture series on pollution prevention topics.

Lectures are free, open to the public, and are held from 11:00 a.m. to noon in the Phoenix Auditorium, DEP Building, 79 Elm St., Hartford. For additional information, contact Lynn Stoddard at (860) 424-3236 or go to www.dep.state.ct.us/calendar/calendar.htm.



June 19, 2003:

Choosing Greener Transportation – Hybrids, Alternatively Fueled Vehicles, and Fuel Cells. Nancy Hazard, Director Transportation Programs, Northeast Sustainable Energy Association.

July 17, 2003:

Promoting Green High Performance Buildings in Connecticut. Kim Trella and Frank Gagliardo, CT DEP.



What do
YOU think?

(about the P2 View)

1. What issues do you want to read about in future issues?
2. Which information in past articles has been most useful to you?

Call (860) 424-3694 or email me, judith.prill@po.state.ct.us to respond to the survey. The first 25 to complete the short reader survey will **receive a free digital thermometer**. Plus, everyone who completes the survey will be entered in a raffle for a special P2 prize.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106-5127
www.dep.state.ct.us
Arthur J. Rocque, Jr., Commissioner

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