

## Policy on Compost and Composting

In 2009, an estimated 30% of compostable organics<sup>1</sup> ended up in the nation's landfills. This green waste should instead be converted into high-quality compost that can safely be used to restore and maintain healthy farmland, vegetable gardens, parks, playgrounds, and urban landscapes.

The Sierra Club supports

- Reducing food waste and reusing grass clippings before they are composted.
- Small- and medium-size composting of organics, such as home composting, vermi-composting, and on-site composting on family farms, community gardens and nurseries. Small-scale composting operations minimize the use of fossil fuel and adverse health and environmental impacts. Backyard composting is layered, watered, and stirred, and should be treated to encourage the growth of oxygen-loving (aerobic) decomposers, which release CO<sub>2</sub> rather than methane. Methane is a more powerful greenhouse gas which is released under the oxygen-starved conditions created by landfill disposal of organic waste.
- Large commercial composting facilities, provided that they are sited and designed to protect public health and the environment, located within 50 miles of where feedstock is generated, minimize truck traffic, and fully address community / host concerns, especially in underserved, disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- Where composting is not feasible, processing organics in anaerobic digesters to create methane as a renewable, non-fossil source of fuel energy.
- Developing national statutory compost standards designed to ensure no net degradation of soils and groundwater and to prevent adverse impacts on human and livestock health.
- Accurate and complete labeling of all compost products.

The Sierra Club opposes

- Using contaminated toxics-containing or pathogen-containing waste as a compost ingredient. Such wastes would include, for example, coal ash, spent foundry sand, industrial sludges, and municipal sewage sludges.
- Decreasing the potential for environmentally responsible composting by mixing clean

compostable waste streams with contaminated waste streams.

<sup>1</sup>. “Organics” refers to food scraps, grass clipping, leaves, brush, branches, other landscape trimmings, clean wood, and some plant derived food processing by-products and food-soiled paper products.

Board of Directors, August 19, 2010