



February 18, 2025

Senate Education, Energy, Environment Committee

SB 732: Sewage Sludge Utilization Permits - Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances - Concentration Limits
Favorable

The Maryland Pesticide Education Network and its Smart on Pesticides Coalition (SOPC), comprised of 112 organizations and businesses, urges a favorable report on SB 732 establishing needed testing requirements to identify PFAS concentrations in biosolids and setting enforceable limits to prevent further contamination. Our organization and SOPC Coalition are well-versed on the issue of PFAS-pesticides which is the focus of another current Maryland bill.

We are very concerned about the use of PFAS-pesticides and PFAS-containing biosolids that are widely used on farms and in land care – both exacerbating a serious long-term health crisis related to the persistence of PFAS in people and our environment that may also result from their exposure to PFAS in their food grown on farms using PFAS-laden biosolids and PFAS-pesticides. PFAS exposure leads to a number of health effects, including causing certain cancers including prostate, breast, and reproductive cancer, is linked to developmental damage in infants and children, fertility and pregnancy problems, endocrine disruption, increased cholesterol, immune system problems, and, interference with liver, thyroid, and pancreatic function. One thing PFAS toxicity does is to target the immune system, which means it can cause decreased antibody response to vaccines and exacerbates autoimmune disorders including asthma and ulcerative colitis.

PFAS-laden biosolids originate from wastewater treatment plants that do NOT breakdown or destroy PFAS compounds. They are retained in "wastewater residuals" and solids known as "sludge." Sludge containing PFAS from wastewater treatment plants is sent to disposal sites or other uses including application to land and use in gardening products. Applying biosolids to land creates hazards at farms and from farm and garden products. Some farms have been forced to discard food products or even cease farming when they found that their land was contaminated by PFAS from biosolids used on their land, as happened for over 60 farms in Maine.

The U.S. EPA warns that especially two kinds of [PFAS chemicals can harm human health](#) when found in biosolids at concentrations as low as 1 part per billion after the material has been disposed of or used as fertilizer. The agency determined the chemicals could leach from sewage sludge when land applied.

The EPA released its [draft risk assessment](#) in January 2025. It's the first comprehensive look at contamination from PFOA and PFOS in biosolids performed by the agency. The assessment finds that "there can be human health risks exceeding EPA's acceptable thresholds, sometimes by several orders of magnitude" from living near sites that have land applied contaminated biosolids or from using groundwater or products impacted by such a site.

PFAS contamination can for generations, even after biosolids are no longer used. For example, according to the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, an organic farm in Maine was found to be contaminated because a previous owner had spread biosolids with PFAS. This happened even though organic farms are not allowed to use biosolids to become certified.

SB 732 is essential to protect Maryland farms and gardens from PFAS contamination; please deliver a favorable report.

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