

# Appendix E: Community Composting in Georgia

This Guide was funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 4 office to create a resource for community composters in the state of Georgia. While the preceding sections and appendices of the Guide will be applicable to community composters anywhere in the country, this appendix summarizes specific regulations relevant to community-scale composters in Georgia. For those outside Georgia, Georgia's rules provide a useful example of how composting at a small scale is regulated.

In Georgia, composting, mulching, and anaerobic digestion facilities are regulated under Rule 391-3-4-.16 of the Georgia Rules for Solid Waste Management, which is enforced by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD). All composting facilities not explicitly exempted from these regulations either fall under the permit-by-rule category or are required to obtain a solid waste handling permit. Permit-by-rule operations only need to meet some of the requirements that those seeking a solid waste handling permit do, making it significantly less expensive and more straightforward to get operational approval from EPD.

Most community composters in Georgia will either be exempt from the requirement for a solid waste handling permit or will fall under the permit-by-rule category. Whether a specific compost operation qualifies for an exemption or a permit-by-rule will depend on factors such as where the composting site is located, the type of feedstocks accepted, and the volume of food residuals, or food scraps, being received. The remainder of this document covers information from Rule 391-3-4-.16 that is most relevant to community composters. It provides an overview of relevant definitions and the requirements for exemption from a solid waste handling permit and for qualifying under the permit-by-rule category.

Compost operations requiring solid waste handling permits will need to secure a permit for the specific technology used and feedstocks processed. Information about solid waste handling permits is not included in this overview. Likewise, regulations pertaining to anaerobic digestion and composting animal mortalities and biosolids are also not covered, as they fall outside of the scope

of this **Guide to Best Management for Community Composting**. Please review Rule 391-3-4-.16 for more information on these topics.

## Definitions

"Source-separated Organics" are defined as organic material including, but not limited to, food residuals, food processing residuals, and compostable paper that has been separated from non-compostable material.

"Food Processing Residuals" are defined as organic material generated as a by-product of the food-processing sector that is non-hazardous and contains no domestic wastewater; it does not include dissolved air flotation skimmings or fats, oil, and greases.

"Food Residuals" are defined as pre- and post-consumer food used as a feedstock in a composting or anaerobic digestion facility.

## Feedstock Categories

The feedstocks a compost site accepts will help to determine whether the site is exempt from permit requirements altogether, or whether it is considered a permit-by-rule site. The feedstock categories that will most likely apply to community-scale composters are as follows:

**Feedstock Category A:** Yard trimmings, land-clearing debris, agricultural residuals generated and processed on site, untreated and unpainted wood, or any combination thereof.

**Feedstock Category B:** Agricultural residuals generated off site, herbivorous animal manure generated at a zoo,\* and/or source-separated organics.

\*herbivorous animal manure generated at a zoo is not allowed for permit-by-rule category facilities.

Approval from EPD may be necessary to determine the appropriate category for a particular feedstock if it's not explicitly listed above. If the latter, EPD may require further information from the site owner or operator to assist in making such determinations. At a minimum, EPD will require operations to have potential feedstocks analyzed for metals, C:N ratio, and soluble salts.

## Exemptions

The following mulching and composting operations are exempt from the requirement for a solid waste handling permit:

1. Backyard composting
2. A facility composting or mulching only Category A feedstock
3. A facility processing less than 40 tons per year of food residuals generated on site and composted in leak-proof containers that prohibit vector attraction and prevent nuisance odor generation
4. Composting of food residuals and yard trimmings generated on site at a K-12 institution for educational purposes
5. Manures managed in accordance with the Georgia Rules for Water Quality Control

Certain exemptions also exist for biosolids and animal mortality composting, and anaerobic digestion. As mentioned in the introduction of this appendix, these topics fall outside of the scope of this guide.

### Permit-by-Rule

Compost operations not included in the above list of exemptions may fall under the permit-by-rule category. Sites composting Category A and B feedstocks that meet both of the following criteria may operate under a permit-by-rule:

- Facilities receiving less than 500 tons of Category B feedstock per calendar month
- For Class 2 facilities, Category B feedstocks shall be restricted to exclude the receipt of non-vegetative food processing residuals and manures

Non-vegetative food processing residuals are defined as “organic material generated as a by-product of the food-processing sector that is non-hazardous and contains no domestic wastewater.” Sites qualifying for the permit-by-rule category are considered Class 2 composting facilities under the Rule.

### Design and Operating Standards

New composting operations qualifying under the permit-by-rule category are required to comply with the design, operating, and siting standards for Class 2 composting facilities.

The design standards for permit-by-rule operations include:

- The composting area shall be constructed to maintain its structural integrity under operating conditions and be capable of supporting vehicular traffic.
- The composting facility shall be adequate in size and capacity to manage the projected volume of compost and residue generated. The areas for storing feedstocks prior to processing shall be clearly defined and the maximum capacity specified.
- For windrow operations, the maximum composting process windrow size and minimum composting process windrow spacing shall match the capability and requirements of the equipment used at the facility.

The operating standards for Class 2 facilities include:

- The composting facility shall have a sign at its entrance that lists the name of the facility, hours of operation, feedstocks accepted, and emergency contact information.
- The composting facility shall have stormwater control measures.
- The composting facility shall prevent flow of contact water from the active composting area into surface water and curing or finished compost areas.
- Suitable measures to control vectors shall be applied.
- Suitable measures to control odors shall be applied.
- Suitable measures to prevent, control, and extinguish fires shall be applied.
- By the end of each operating day, all incoming Category B feedstock must be processed into the active composting area, transferred to leak-proof containment, or mixed with bulking material and covered in a manner that minimizes nuisance odors and scavenging by vectors.
- No material shall be stored in excess of the designated capacity.
- Storage of finished compost on site is limited to 12 months, unless approved by the Division on a case-by-case basis.

- Non-compostable material and solid waste generated on site shall be stored in a waste container and then either recycled or disposed of at a permitted solid waste facility.
  - Facilities accepting Category B feedstocks from off site shall track incoming feedstocks and finished compost. Records documenting compliance of the composting facility with these Rules shall be kept for a minimum of three years in a form suitable for submission to or inspection by the Division. Records shall include the weight or volume (in tons or cubic yards) of the feedstocks accepted, total compost produced, and any amount sold or used. Records shall be retained at the composting facility unless an off-site storage location is approved by the Division.
  - Operation and management shall be under the supervision and control of an individual properly trained in the operation of such facilities at all times. Facility operations managers must be able to document training in the basics of composting facility operations.
  - Notice of final closure shall be provided to the Director within 60 days from final receipt of feedstock. Any site not receiving feedstock in excess of 180 days, unless properly closed or otherwise approved by the Division, shall be deemed closed and in violation of these Rules. Notice of closure shall include documentation that all feedstocks and active, curing, and final compost materials have been removed from the facility and that the site has been stabilized in accordance with the Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in Georgia.
3. A 200-foot buffer shall be maintained between the composting operation and any adjacent residences and/or drinking water supply wells.
  4. A 50-foot buffer shall be maintained between the composting operation and all streams.
  5. A description of surrounding land uses up to a half-mile radius shall be provided.
  6. Airport safety restrictions, as required by Rule 391-3-4-.05(1)(c) for MSWLF units, shall be met.

## Siting Criteria

Class 2 composting facilities shall comply with the following criteria:

1. The facility shall not be located in the 100-year floodplain.
2. A 50-foot undisturbed buffer shall be maintained between the composting operation and the property line.