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Ken Kirk

August 24, 2001
Attention: Martha McAteer
Letters to the Editor
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20071

In Defense of Sludge

I feel it is critical to respond to the unusually lopsided coverage *The Washington Post* is giving to the use of sludge (i.e., treated waste) as fertilizer.

The Post first published an article on Aug. 6 titled, "Health Fears Over Sludge Spur Quest for Controls," which failed to recognize the critical steps being taken by municipal officials to protect the safety and health of their workers and the general public when land-applying sludge. Furthermore, the article attributed two deaths to land-applied "sludge" despite the fact that rigorous scientific and medical reviews showed consistently that sludge was in no way responsible for these deaths.

The Post then published an August 23 letter-to-the-editor by Caroline Snyder which denigrated the use of sludge without a reference to the fact that she is a noted activist for the Sierra Club, an organization with an outspoken environmental agenda that includes bashing the land application of sludge.

Yet, nowhere does *The Post* reference the formidable regulatory structure that ensures the safe application of this resource or the innovative environmental management systems (EMSs) increasingly used by wastewater treatment agencies to ensure public accountability in handling biosolids management issues.

The regulations governing the centuries-old practice of land applying biosolids are the product of a ten-year effort that includes the active involvement of numerous federal and state regulatory agency officials and eminent independent scientists from across the U.S. The data consistently concludes that treated, land-applied sewage sludge poses no health threat to the public.

Let's be honest — the fact that this resource is derived from human waste complicates efforts to gain broad public acceptance of beneficial reuse. People do not want to smell their own, or their neighbor's, "business". But odor should not be

confused with a demonstrated cause of illness, especially when the benefits from land application are so well documented.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Kirk". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Ken Kirk
Executive Director