# OCSD's Biosolids Environmental Management System: Blossoming as a Certified Agency

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In July 2003, **Orange County Sanitation District (OCSD)** Fountain Valley, CA became the first agency to have a verified Biosolids Environmental Management System (EMS). The first interim, third-party audit was performed in June 2004.

### *Audit Findings Bring Continuous Improvements*

Every audit offers opportunities to improve our biosolids. Findings from the June 2004 audit have prompted OCSD staff to further improve how we plan and track goals and objectives. The third-party audit findings also offered some good suggestions for our Vendors to improve operations, including improving the availability of emergency response plans to drivers and consistently following standard operating procedures as they are written.

### *Continuing Improvements Blossom*

Becoming the first agency in the nation was just the beginning of the road for OCSD. Since our certification, we have had several opportunities to bring new life, in the form of continuous improvement, to our biosolids program.

### *Continuing to Improve Internal Communications*

Improved internal communications is one of the largest benefits OCSD has seen from our Biosolids EMS. Better internal communications increase internal efficiencies, head-off issues before they become a problem, and can even save an agency money! Since OCSD's certification, we have created a Biosolids EMS Steering Team (BEST) to assure regular discussion among the various value chain members. As time goes on, we have further fine-tuned this process to create a more efficient, more frequently meeting sub-group. In addition, the BEST meets with the managers of the value chain (Operations, Technical Services, Vendors) to perform our annual management review. These meetings have facilitated important coordination discussions among our staff and Vendors. During an annual management review meeting, one member of our upper management team recently stated that the EMS has "knit this agency together like few other programs could."

*OCSD's member agency, Huntington Beach, picking up some free compost during the Earth Day 2004 event.*

### *Regular Stakeholder Updates*

Whenever something noteworthy happens (e.g., annual reports, updated EMS manual, Grand Jury report, lessons learned paper, audit participation and results, etc.) in our OCSD program, our biosolids staff send out an e-mail notification to our list of interested parties. One of these updates generated positive feedback from an official at Region IX EPA who said, "I think OCSD is doing a super job of public info and outreach."

### *Internal Stakeholder Outreach*

OCSD's Biosolids EMS has helped us keep our staff, an important stakeholder, informed and aware of our biosolids program. Each year, the Biosolids Team has hosted an annual event to encourage OCSD staff to learn about our program. Once OCSD added compost to our biosolids management options, we worked with our compost vendor, Synagro, to offer a compost give-away event for staff. In March of 2005, we added on a tour of the compost facility. Each year, we have been able to outreach to more staff and teach them about our program. Staff are a vital stakeholder since they represent our agency to their friends and neighbors. These events also give our Biosolids Team a great face-to-face opportunity to let staff know who to contact if they have feedback or issues to discuss, which encourages

*OCSD's BEST group encourages proactive problem solving and discussing issues as a cross-divisional team that includes our Vendors!*

more staff to take more proactive approaches to the biosolids value chain. One staff member, who reluctantly took a bucket of compost last year, was back this year with a pick-up truck! This event is a perfect opportunity to explain what a positive product biosolids can create.

OCSD and Synagro also use the compost give-away as an opportunity to encourage our member agencies to utilize biosolids-based compost inside Orange County. They can stop by with a small truck to try the product out. Our Member Agency Compost Use Program offers a free first load of compost then provides the agencies that use Synagro's compost with discounts and special offers. Local non-profit organizations are also starting to show an interest in utilizing the compost inside the county.

### *External Stakeholder Outreach*

OCSD is working with its Vendors and local communities around our biosolids management sites to build individual relationships. Upon completion of the December 2003 Long-Range Biosolids Management Plan, OCSD staff started planning a public participation opportunity in the form of a Biosolids Advisory Committee (BAC). The committee was announced to over 2,000 local Orange County residents and biosolids program interested parties. The BAC met from October 2004 – February 2005 and learned about the biosolids management proposals and needs of the biosolids program. The BAC produced a report (http://www.ocsd.com/info/biosolids/bac/downloads.asp) that gave OCSD's Board of Directors guidance for issuing the interim-term contracts that the Board will be considering in the spring of 2005.

### *Encouraging Vendor EMSs*

In April 2004, OCSD's Board of Directors signed a contract amendment for our compost vendor, Synagro, which included a commitment to support a new composting facility. Part of this contract amendment required that Synagro create an EMS and become certified. This requirement may promote Synagro to be the first NBP-certified composting facility! A Vendor with a certified EMS is very valuable since the public, generators, and clients of that Vendor can be that much more confident in the quality of their operations.

### *Back to 101 to Get to the Next Level*

As time goes on, staffing responsibilities change. OCSD sent two staff to the Biosolids 101 Workshop in Kalamazoo, Michigan in January 2005. This review of the basic NBP Biosolids EMS program provided staff with a good refresher, re-energized our EMS staff, and also offered the other attendees the experiences of a certified agency. This training was also instrumental to OCSD's recent Biosolids EMS Manual streamlining effort. OCSD Biosolids EMS staff took the knowledge of the overview workshop and effectively streamlined our manual down to 60 pages from 180 pages. The most recent all-electronic version of this EMS Manual can always be found at www.ocsd.com/info/biosolids/ ems.asp <http://www.ocsd.com/info/biosolids/%20ems.asp> .

### *More Recognition for Our Efforts*

OCSD was presented with an Environmental Protection Agency 2004 National Clean Water Act Recognition Award for Special Recognition in Biosolids Exemplary Management at the October 2004 Water Environment Federation conference in New Orleans. This award was in the most part due to OCSD's efforts related to our Biosolids EMS including, "…for demonstrating a continued commitment to effective biosolids program planning, management, public outreach and stakeholder involvement, and pioneering EMS efforts."

*EPA's Director of the Office of Wastewater Management, Jim Hanlon, presented EPA Special Recognition Award to Mike Moore, Environmental Assessment Division Manager in charge of OCSD's Biosolids Program.*

**"The EMS has resulted in a culture change that has directly translated into cost savings. For example, during a recent build out, staff members took the initiative to review the proposed engineering specs and identified an opportunity that saved us over $100,000."**

*—Dan Thompson, City of Tacoma, WA*