Biosolids Communications Toolkit

Thursday, February 4, 2021
3:00 – 4:00 PM ET
How to Participate Today

• Audio Modes
  • Listen using Mic & Speakers
  • Or, select “Use Telephone” and dial the conference (please remember long distance phone charges apply).

• Submit your questions using the Questions pane.

• A recording will be available for replay shortly after this webcast.

Biosolids Communications Toolkit

How to successfully talk about biosolids with your community

Presented by Samantha Villegas, APR
Director of Strategic Communication Services
Raftelis
But First, THANK YOU

- Travis Loop, WEF
- Patrick Dube, WEF
- Allison Fore, Patrick Thomas, and Dominic Brose, MWRD
- Natalie Sierra and John Willis, Brown & Caldwell
- Manon Fisher and Karri Ving, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
- Ned Beecher, New England Biosolids
- Christopher Peot, DCWater
- Trevor Brown, Region of Waterloo
- Maile Lono-Batura, NW Biosolids
- William Toffey, MA Biosolids
- Mike McGill, Water PIO
- Jean Creech, City of Charlotte, NC

Agenda

1. Review overall challenge
2. The importance of proper methodology
3. The quick and dirty (top 10)
4. How to use strategy to meet your communication goals
5. Messaging about biosolids that works
6. Handling negative reactions
7. Guest case studies
8. Images that make your point
Why Is It Hard To Talk About Biosolids?

- Tough terminology
- Misinformation
- Lack of science literacy
- Sensational articles
- Fear

The Importance of Proper Methodology

- Proven techniques
- Keeps you focused
- Uses resources wisely
- Applies lessons learned
- Enables coordinated effort
One Size Does NOT Fit All

GROUND LEVEL
Simplified
Inexpensive
Quick

SUBSURFACE
Higher complexity
Higher cost
More involved

DIG DEEP
Most complex
Requires investment
Takes time

If You Do Nothing Else, DO THESE 10 THINGS
1. Use the Message Platform

Start using the message platform in this toolkit in all your materials. Be sure to note terms to avoid. Update all existing materials and share revised materials with your staff.

2. Post a Web Page

Make sure you have a web page dedicated to biosolids. In addition to facts and figures, share stories of real people doing the work, and those benefitting from biosolids.

Include a way for those who read your web page to get in touch with someone for more information.
3. Engage on Social Media

Start a conversation on social media!
Use the sample posts we have provided in this toolkit.

4. Use Beautiful, Accurate Images

Improve your photography. It’s so true a picture is worth much more than words, so show, don’t tell. We offer some tips on taking photos and using imagery in this toolkit.
5. Talk to Your Leadership

Make the business case to leadership for taking a measured, proactive approach to communicating about biosolids, using the guidance we provide.

6. Prioritize Stakeholders

Prioritize your stakeholders to save time and resources so you are certain to be communicating with the folks with the most influence in your success. Check out the stakeholder chart for guidance.
7. Engage Influencers

Identify partners and influencers who can add credibility to your story and help you get the messages to audiences beyond your reach. Talk to them about your messages and discuss collaboration opportunities.

8. Create A Presentation

Create a presentation about your program that can be customized for a variety of audiences. Discuss the process for creating biosolids, the benefits, the applications and use lots of imagery and data to tell your story.
9. Invite People In

Invite the media, customers, elected officials, and others to take a tour of your plant. Explain the process for creating biosolids and describe the end users and end products, highlighting the benefits.

10. Prepare for Tough Talks

Have a plan for dealing with disagreeable people. Consult the difficult conversations section and discuss with your leadership who will handle these situations. Prepare messages in advance and remember to seek understanding first, show empathy, then facts.
HOW TO CREATE

A Strategic Communication & Outreach Plan

Step One:
RESEARCH
Understand Your Stakeholders & Environment

Research can help you define and identify:
WHO Do you need to reach?
WHAT Do you want them to know, do, or believe?
HOW Will you reach them?

What environment will you be working in, meaning what external factors will impact your success?

What messages should you convey to change their awareness, attitude or behavior?

Step Two:
PLANNING
Key Strategies to Consider

- Internal Outreach
- Partners/Influencers
- Local Media
- Social Media
- Digital Advertising
- Events and Tours
### Sample Channel Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Resources Needed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Biosolids are an environmentally</td>
<td>Their monthly meetings</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Article Slide deck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>renewable resource</td>
<td>Submit articles for member newsletter or</td>
<td></td>
<td>Handout (fact sheet)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>blog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Media</td>
<td>Biosolids help create resilient local</td>
<td>Contact via email or Twitter</td>
<td>At</td>
<td>A strong pitch with</td>
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<td></td>
<td>economies</td>
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<td>Milestones</td>
<td>statistics, infographics,</td>
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<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>and/or interview</td>
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<td>subjects</td>
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<td>Customers</td>
<td>Biosolids help beautify communities</td>
<td>Partners (affinity groups)</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Content for partners</td>
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<td>affordably</td>
<td>local media</td>
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<td>to share</td>
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<td>social media</td>
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<td>Images, Infographics</td>
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<td>Video</td>
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<td>Stories</td>
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Techniques for Evaluation

- **GROUND LEVEL**
  - Compare work to goals and objectives
  - Poll your colleagues for feedback

- **SUBSURFACE**
  - Develop online poll
  - Seek outcomes, not outputs
  - Dig into SM metrics

- **DIG DEEP**
  - Full survey
  - Focus groups

Talking About Biosolids

- **Words That Are Relatable and Understandable**
  - Reuse
  - Recycle
  - Affordable
  - Safe
  - Poop
  - Natural

- **Words to Avoid**
  - Sludge
  - Toxic
  - Organic
  - Effluent
  - Dumping
  - Humanure
Talking About Biosolids

Key Overarching Message
Biosolids begin as waste—your poop to be exact. Scientists developed a wastewater treatment process that turns what you flush into valuable nutrients and renewable energy. This is a safe, inexpensive way to keep your utility bill low, improve our environment, and provide farmers with better soil.

Biosolids are an innovative way we recycle human poop into renewable energy and resources.

Utilities across the country have been safely making biosolids for decades.

Biosolids are a safe, natural, and endlessly renewable resource that improves our environment, lowers costs of wastewater treatment, and supports farmers.

How to Address Negativity

• Get out into the community
• Use the guidance here for working with the traditional media and social media.
• Try and get this done before the first truck delivers the product.
• Don’t ignore the issue or minimize it.
CASE STUDY:
Hit Back on A Hit Piece

Michelle Zdrodowski, Chief Public Affairs Officer
Great Lakes Water Authority

MISSION and transmission of water and wastewater, while promoting health communities and economic growth.
Background

“Today a story is not told until its sold.”

- The majority of journalists are committed to telling the full story – including balanced viewpoints in their coverage. Unfortunately, there are some that know the story they want to tell, or are using their platform to advance a specific point of view that they may hold and only go through the motions to produce a fair and balanced story.

- GLWA found itself in just this situation in 2020, when we were contacted by a freelance reporter working on a story about biosolids and PFAS.

- We had been contacted by the reporter for a story on biosolids the year before, but he published the story before we could get him the answers to his questions (within hours).
Previous Experience Should Inform Future Interactions – Not Stop Them

- Responded quickly, asking for his deadline
- Asked for written questions to be sure we could provide him with the best information possible
- Engaged Executive Leadership and SMEs
- Developed comprehensive answers to the reporter’s questions – including providing appropriate data/statistics/charts
- Met the reporter’s deadline!

Despite Doing Everything Right, Things Can Go Wrong

In a written statement sent to Metro Times, the Great Lakes Water Authority stressed that it follows the law in testing for contaminants and said it monitors for new pollutants of concern, like PFAS.

"As regulatory agencies identify emerging pollutants, GLWA works with the agencies to develop and implement plans to minimize or eliminate the pollutant from our wastewater discharge," a spokesperson wrote.

The outcome of 2 pages of detailed responses

Review, Assess & Set the Record Straight

**Review**

- Review the article:
  - Facts
  - Inclusion of response information
  - Misstatements
  - Inaccuracies

- **DO NOT** over-react!

**To Respond or Not to Respond?**

- Holding journalists to their high standards of their profession is critical.
- It’s important to weigh the cost benefit of reaching out to the reporter to correct any inaccuracies, misstatements, etc.
- Some things to consider:
  - Will it extend the story?
  - Will the reporter be willing to accept your input (especially if they have a strong POV)

**Set the Record Straight**

**Take Control of Your Own Narrative**

- If you see benefit in reaching out the reporter, address the specific points that you believe to be incorrect
  - Be factual
  - Give specific examples and the correct information

- Whether you choose to respond to the reporter or not, it’s critical to make the correct information directly available to your stakeholders.
  - Create a Fact/Myth analysis of the issues that are incorrect in the article
  - Develop an FAQ about your program and its benefits
  - Create assets to use on social media, website, etc.
Summary of To Dos

- Review the toolkit
- Download the materials
- Reach out if needed
- Refer to top 10 “To Do” list

To access the toolkit, go to:
www.wef.org/resources/topics/browse-topics-a-n/biosolids/

QUESTIONS?

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Thank You!

DESIGN ELEMENTS
Design Elements

- Farms
- Gardens
- Energy
- Safety
- Environment
- Climate Change
- Clean Air
- Economic
- Innovation

Image Library + Guidance
Sample Social Media

From farm to table to farm!
Biosolids improve soil health and increase crop yields better than chemical fertilizers do.

Our poop has power!
Biosolids generate enough energy to power cities like New York.

Can you say, pay dirt?
Using biosolids saves farmers money, creates jobs, and lowers treatment costs.

Safe for gardens!
Every academic research study proves that Class A biosolids are safe for use as compost in your gardens.

Wait, poop can do that?
Biosolids are a renewable resource that can be used to create heat and power.

Biosolids burn cleaner!
Burning biosolids improves air quality as much as removing nearly half the cars from our roads.

Sample Social Media: A Closer Look

Our poop has power!
Biosolids generate enough energy to power cities like New York.
Bill Insert Templates

Fact Sheet Templates
Rack Card Templates