

Sierra Club Policy on Compost and Composting

In 2009, an estimated 30% of **compostable organics (1)** ended up in the nation's landfills. This green waste could instead be converted into high quality compost that can safely be used to restore and maintain healthy farmland, vegetable gardens, parks, playgrounds, and urban landscapes.

The Sierra Club supports:

- Reducing food waste and reusing grass clippings before they are composted.
- Small-and medium size composting of organics, such as home composting, on site composting on family farms and nurseries. Small-scale composting operations minimize the use of fossil fuel and adverse health and environmental impacts. Backyard composting is layered, watered, and stirred to encourage the growth of oxygen-loving (aerobic) decomposers. These aerobic organisms release CO₂ rather than methane; methane is a more powerful greenhouse gas which is released under the oxygen-starved conditions created by land filling organic waste.
- Large commercial composting facilities that are sited and designed to protect public health and the environment, located within 50 miles of where feedstock is generated, minimize truck traffic, and fully address community / host concerns, especially in underserved, disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- Where composting is not feasible, processing organics in anaerobic digesters to create methane as a renewable source of non-fossil fuel energy.
- Developing national statutory compost standards designed to ensure a no net degradation of soils and groundwater and prevent adverse impacts on human and livestock health.
- Accurate and complete labeling of all compost products.

The Sierra Club opposes:

- **Using contaminated toxics-containing or pathogen-containing waste as a compost ingredient. Such wastes would include, for example, coal ash, spent foundry sand, industrial sludges, and municipal sewage sludges.**
- **Decreasing the potential for environmentally responsible composting by mixing clean compostable waste streams with contaminated waste streams.**

(1) "Organics" refers to food scraps, grass clipping, leaves, brush, branches, other landscape trimmings, clean wood, and some plant derived food processing by-products and food-soiled paper products.