

1977

• United States General Accounting Office issued memo to EPA warning that “sewage sludge products having high amounts of cadmium are being sold or given away to the public for uncontrolled use.”

1977

• EPA Director Douglas Costle’s October 3rd memo reaffirmed the EPA’s support of land application of sludge, bringing into attention largely overlooked amendments to the 1972 Water Pollution Control Act recommending the practice as an alternative. The Clean Water Act of 1977 advanced the idea by offering bonuses to facilities incorporating such treatment methods.

1977

• Water Pollution Control Federation director Robert A. Canham criticized the EPA’s enthusiasm for land application of sludge, which he feared could introduce viruses into the food chain. “The results can be disastrous,” he warned.

1978

• In reaction to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, the EPA found itself in what has been termed a Sludge War. The issue at the center of the battle was the classification of municipal sewage sludge. Despite the efforts of EPA whistleblower William Sanjour and several others, the fateful decision was made to classify sludge as solid waste, not hazardous waste.

1981

• EPA issued public relations report on barriers to acceptance of sewage sludge by the public.

1989

• EPA deleted the fact that five of the admitted twenty-one carcinogens in sludge are carcinogenic when inhaled in dust from 503-- Arsenic, Beryllium, Cadmium, Chromium IV and Nickel. (FR 54, p. 5777)

1991

• Water Pollution Control Federation reversed its position on sludge and created a Name Change Task Force to find a nice name for the stuff. Biosolids was the winning entry of a contest they ran. Shortly thereafter, they changed their own name to Water Environment Federation.

1992

• EPA awarded \$300,000 grant to Water Environment Federation to “educate the public” about the “beneficial uses” of sewage sludge. At the time, WEF was trying to get the term biosolids added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

1997

• In a letter dated November 10th, EPA’s Assistant Administrator Robert Perciasepe appealed to USDA Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger for assistance in getting sludge approved for use in organic farming. “Assuming that the organic standards rule is corrected so that practices which can cause disease are omitted, I request that high quality biosolids [sludge] be included as a recognized suitable material for organic food production.”

1999

• EPA approved 100,000 ppm of Chromium in land applied sludge

2002

• EPA Office of the Inspector General report contained admission that “EPA cannot assure the public that current land application practices are protective of human health and the environment.”

2003

• EPA’s first Targeted National Sewage Sludge Survey found 15 substances of concern in sludge.

2003

• David Lewis, EPA microbiologist, fired after 31 years for criticizing the agency’s pro-sludge stance.

2009

• EPA’s Targeted National Sewage Sludge Survey found all 145 analytes present in at least one sludge sample.