

# Sewage sludge

The aim of these rules is to make sure that when sewage sludge is used in agriculture there is no risk to human, animal or plant health and no harmful effects on soil.

## A. You must

1. take account of the nutrient needs of plants when applying sewage sludge;
2. make sure soil quality is not impaired when applying sewage sludge by not:
  - using sewage sludge unless it has been properly sampled and analysed;
  - using sewage sludge on soil which has not been properly sampled and analysed;
  - exceeding the limits for the average annual rate of addition to land through sewage sludge of the specified elements<sup>1</sup>;
  - using sewage sludge on land where the limits for specified elements<sup>2</sup> are exceeded, or where using sewage sludge would cause them to be exceeded;
  - using sewage sludge on soil which has a pH value of less than 5;
3. make sure that the quality of surface water is not impaired when applying sewage sludge;
4. make sure that the quality of groundwater is not impaired when applying sewage sludge;



(photo credit: Environment Agency)

- 1 As detailed in the sludge table in Schedule 1 of the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 and available from the cross compliance section of our website [rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/appendices](http://rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/appendices).
- 2 As detailed in the soil table in Schedule 2 of the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 and available from the cross compliance section of our website [rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/appendices](http://rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/appendices).

5. follow the cropping and grazing restrictions and not:
  - use sewage sludge on land where fruit or vegetable crops, other than fruit trees, are being grown or harvested at the time of use of the sludge;
  - harvest fruit and vegetable crops that are grown in direct contact with the soil and normally eaten raw, for 10 months from the date the sewage sludge or septic tank sludge is used;
  - graze animals or harvest forage crops for 3 weeks from the date the sewage sludge or septic tank sludge is used;
6. work into the soil, as soon as possible, any untreated sludge<sup>3</sup>, including untreated septic tank sludge, that has been used on land without being injected into the soil;
7. give the sludge producer the following information (where sludge has been used on any land, other than by or on behalf of the sludge producer):
  - the address and area of the agricultural unit concerned;
  - the date on which the sludge was used;
  - the quantity of sludge used; and
  - the name and address of that supplier and the quantity supplied (when you have used sludge supplied by another sludge producer).

Rules A1 to A4 and the first bullet points of A5 and A7 do not apply to septic tank sludge.

The third and fourth bullet points of rule A2 not to exceed limits of elements (as listed in the sludge and soil tables) do not apply if you farm a dedicated site<sup>4</sup>.



#### Further advice and guidance

The appendix for sewage sludge (SMR 3) is available on our website at [rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/appendices](http://rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/appendices)

Environment Agency: 03708 506 506

<sup>3</sup> 'Untreated sludge' has not undergone biological, chemical or heat treatment, long-term storage or any suitable process to reduce its fermentability and health hazards.

<sup>4</sup> A 'dedicated site' is one that was dedicated to the disposal of sludge in 1986, and has been notified to the Environment Agency.