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EPA Continues to Promote Biosolids, despite OIG Warnings

On 11/18/18 the EPA Inspector General (OIG) released a report titled, **EPA Unable to Assess the Impact of Hundreds of Unregulated Pollutants in Land-Applied Biosolids on Human Health and the Environment.**

EPA's Office of Water (OW) is in charge of enforcing the Clean Water Act and the management of Biosolids. Before releasing this Report, OIG asked EPA to take corrective actions on a number of items, including collecting data on where and how much biosolids are land-applied and how much is used to grow edible plants.

Most important, EPA was asked to modify its web page and all of its other related documents on the question, "Is the use of Biosolids safe?" OIG asked OW to remove a sentence from the 1996 National Academy of Sciences Report (NAS) that stated **"Biosolids pose negligible risks to public health and the environment."** [Presumably, OIG did not agree that the risks were negligible]. Top OW managers removed that sentence, substituting a sentence from the 2002 NAS Report: **"There is no documented scientific evidence that biosolids pose a risk to human health and the environment."** But that statement makes no sense. Former high-ranking EPA research microbiologist, David Lewis, had given the panel plenty of evidence that biosolids do pose a risk to human health, agriculture, or the environment. In order to have the no-evidence sentence make sense, the NAS panel chair deleted, without approval of other members, all references to Lewis's work from the final Report.

In the end, OW agreed to modify its safety claims, but only after the agency completed risk assessments for hundreds of unregulated pollutants that have been detected in biosolids. However, on 9/17/18 OW told OIG that it lacks the tools and data to do such risk assessments, even on the 352 pollutants EPA has earmarked as priority items.

Meanwhile, until OW does these risks assessments – which it says it cannot do because it has neither the data nor tools to do so – EPA intends to vigorously promote the use of biosolids as an excellent, natural, and completely safe fertilizer.