

Local sewage useful in replenishing soil

by Brian Boyer

Battalion Staff
Bryan-College Station residents may not realize it, but they produce sewage they can be proud of. According to a Texas A&M graduate student, local sewage sludge can be used to replenish depleted soil and enrich its ability to support crops.

The sludge is suitable due to the lack of heavy metals in the material, says William Hornby, who is working on a master's degree in soil and crop sciences. Some communities have heavy metals in their sewage due to industrial waste.

What local sewage sludge does have, Hornby says, is organic matter that can enrich soil and improve its water-holding capacity. Hornby says his research has shown that sewage sludge can replenish soil faster than conventional methods.

Environmental laws require that strip-mined land be reclaimed, or returned to its original state. This means that min-

ing companies must replenish the soil so it is at least as fertile as it was before the mining operation started.

In Texas, strip-mined soil is leveled and treated with chemical fertilizers. It is then planted with rye or bermuda grass and covered with mulched hay to retain moisture and rebuild the soil's organic content.

The sludge process bypasses this final step and replenishes the organic content much faster, Hornby says. Since soil uncovered by strip mining is clay and tends to clump together, the organic content is critical to make the soil hold water and allow plants to grow. While this method has been used in other states, Hornby says, it has never been done before in Texas.

Hornby maintains test plots using conventional reclamation methods and others using varying amounts of sludge, and has documented the results with photographs. The test plots treated with sludge show significantly more growth than plots

treated with conventional chemical means.

Hornby is also testing the sludge-enriched overburden in an incubated laboratory project to test its performance under ideal conditions.

The Environmental Protection Agency agrees with Hornby's findings. According to an EPA study, which used testing conditions similar to Hornby's, the process can reclaim mined land with no adverse effects on the environment.

A test conducted by the Tennessee Valley Authority over a three-year period is also encouraging. They found that "the heavy rates of municipal compost (sewage sludge) applied in these tests produced no toxic symptoms during four years of observation, and resulted in an impressive development of vegetation."

There are some problems with the sludge, however. It needs to be tested constantly to make sure no industrial wastes have introduced harmful substances. It can be a health hazard, since various diseases thrive in the material. It can also be inconvenient to transport.

These problems can be overcome, but the biggest obstacle, Hornby says, is likely to be public opinion.

"People generally say 'Sure, as long as it's not in my backyard'" in response to the plan, Hornby says.

The City of Bryan now dumps its sewage sludge in a sanitary landfill, according to waste treatment operator Freddy Walker. This is not the best method for dealing with the sludge, which can pollute groundwater with dangerous levels of nitrates when large amounts accumulate in one place.



Mike Davis, Battalion Staff

Awestruck

Local children gaze as bands, clowns, floats and cars decorated in the Christmas spirit, during the Bryan-College Station Chamber of

Commerce Christmas Parade Sunday. Santa elves, E.T. and Chuck E. Cheese all showed up in their Christmas best for the parade.

Contest

More Christmas card design entrants needed

by Debbie E. Warren

Battalion Reporter
Marci Rodgers received 29 Christmas cards before Thanksgiving last year, but this year she wasn't so popular.

Rodgers is in charge of the College Station Christmas card contest. The deadline for the contest passed almost two weeks ago with only two entries.

Rodgers says the deadline for entries has been extended to Wednesday in hopes that more people will enter.

"Last year we had so many good entries," Rodgers says. "I don't know what happened this

year. We have advertised with the schools so maybe some other art classes will enter."

This is the second year for the contest, in which 8 foot by 10 foot yuletide cards are painted by contestants on plywood panels.

Rodgers says entrants must submit samples of their card designs on 6 inch by 12 inch posterboard. Samples have to be turned in no later than Wednesday to the Parks and Recreation Department office in Central Park.

Contestants should put their name, address and phone number on the back of the cards. Groups or individuals of all ages may enter.

"Three judges will decide which cards are the best based on design concept, originality and execution," Rodgers says. "Ten winners will be chosen, all of which will then pick up the wood panels and paint their designs onto them. They will return the cards back to us by Dec. 15."

Rodgers says the cards will be judged again after the giant panels are painted. The top three winners will get prizes of \$75, \$50 and \$25.

"This is the first year we have had cash prizes," she says. "Hopefully this will cover some of the cost to the contestant for paint and so forth and just add a little incentive."

Rodgers says the plywood panels have been donated by a local lumber company, but contestants will be responsible for all paint and other materials.



Charles P. Dungan, Battalion Staff

The cards will be displayed in front of the College Station City Hall and the Community Center after they are finished.

"We got a lot of response from the cards last year," Rodgers says. "People

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MSC POLITICAL FORUM

General Meeting

MSC Political Forum

Tuesday, Dec. 6, 1983

7:30 p.m. 510 Rudder

This will be the last meeting of the semester. All members are encouraged to attend.

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All proceeds will be donated to Grace Bible Church Youth Group