



Contamination management

FACTSHEET 12

*Food and Garden Organics
Best Practice Collection Manual*

The importance of low contamination

- It's important to maintain low levels of contamination, in order to:
 - Decrease processing costs
 - Ensure the products meet regulatory requirements
 - Ensure the composted products can be marketed and used without causing harmful environmental impacts.

Contaminants in organics

- Contaminants can be differentiated into:
 - **Physical contaminants**, which comprise non-compostable impurities (e.g. plastic, glass, metal, rocks)
 - **Chemical contaminants**, which include mainly heavy metals and herbicides
 - **Biological contaminants**, which represent plant, animal and human pathogens and also viable plant parts or seeds.

Contamination management

- A contamination management prevention plan should be developed and include:
 - Education material for householders, including visually appealing lists and stickers of what can and what can't go into the organics bin. Clear symbols (i.e. ticks and crosses) should be used to ensure the material is easily understood.
 - On-going public education and motivation.
 - Communications material for the local media, councillors, senior staff etc.
 - Arrangements with waste collection personnel regarding contaminated bins and use of contamination tags for non-compliant households.
 - Arrangements with the processor regarding contaminated material for the initial roll out of the service and on-going maintenance of the service. This may include penalty payments if contamination levels exceed a certain threshold.
 - Continuous monitoring and evaluation in problem areas through bin inspections, waste auditing and community consultation.

Issues to be aware of

- Particular issues related to combined food and garden organics collections include:
 - **Liners:** promote compostable plastic liners, paper liners or no liners.
 - **Liner supply:** if liners are promoted whether they will be supplied by council (how many for how long) or if residents have to provide their own.
 - **Contaminant removal:** whether plastic bags and other large impurities are going to be handpicked and removed at the processing facility or not. Hand sorting increases processing costs and may also require colouring or marking compostable bin liners so they can be easily differentiated from other plastics.
 - **Use of a bag shredder:** will a shredder be deployed to rip open compostable bin liners to release food material? This may result in small pieces of non-compostable plastic within the end product.
 - **Organics shredder:** will kerbside collected garden and food organics be shredded? This could result in small pieces of plastic that are hard to separate from the finished compost and mulch.
 - **Communications:** will contaminated bins be identified, remedial action taken with the individual household and the service ultimately removed if contamination continues? Community and council support for the service may influence acceptance of various options for dealing with households unable or unwilling to correctly use the service.

NB: Information in this presentation is taken from the *Food and Garden Organics Best Practice Collection Manual* (2012) published by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The full document is available on the department's website

www.environment.gov.au/wastepolicy/publications/organics-collection-manual