2013 Composting Systems Excellence Award

Old Macon Road Landfill Composting Facility
Dublin, Georgia

Submitted by:

LAURENS COUNTY
Solid Waste Management AUTHORITY

May 17, 2013
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Executive Summary

The Laurens County Solid Waste Management Authority (LCSWMA) owns and manages the 498-acre Old Macon Road Landfill (OMRLF) in Dublin, Georgia and makes a concerted effort to extend the landfill’s life through saving airspace by initiating recycling and reuse programs. In 2008, OMRLF was the first landfill approved to compost biosolids in Georgia. OMRLF receives 2,300 tons of biosolids annually where it is mixed with yard waste and formed into windrows for composting. The landfill’s program also is approved to receive food waste from public schools, animal mortalities and other feedstocks for composting. Finished compost is used onsite where it provides a vigorous jump-start to vegetation growth and aids in erosion control and is made available to the public. Through the composting program and other green initiatives, such as PET bottle and single stream recycling, LCSWMA has proven their stewardship to the environment and dedication to green consciousness.
The national award-winning Old Macon Road Landfill in Dublin, Georgia is owned and managed by the Laurens County Solid Waste Management Authority (LCSWMA). The landfill is comprised of a total of 498 acres of what was formerly farmland. It receives approximately 240 tons of waste per day which includes municipal solid waste (MSW); construction and demolition waste (C&D); yard waste; tires; white goods; electronics; biosolids; and animal mortality waste. The MSW landfill is constructed with the standard Subtitle “D” regulation composite liner system which includes a compacted 24” layer of clay; 60 mil high density polyethylene liner; a leachate collection piping system and a 24” layer of protective covering. An active program demonstrating LCSWMA’s commitment to recycling and reuse is their composting operation on the site of the Old Macon Road Landfill. Since the initiation of their composting program in 2008, biosolids and chipped yard waste transported to the landfill are unloaded in designated lined cells that have received an initial lift of MSW. A unique aspect of this composting operation is the use of existing lined cells as opposed to expensive concrete or asphalt pads that would require additional stormwater infrastructure. In the past the landfill had overbuilt the lined area because of the economic benefit of buying liner material in quantity and eliminating multiple mobilizations of contractors to build new cells. The excess of lined cells was turned into a grand recycling opportunity allowing for the placement of their composting operations. An initial lift of MSW and cover was placed in the designated cells to protect the liner/leachate collection system from compost windrow turning equipment and the “heat” of active biological action. The liner and leachate collection system provide protection from runoff of liquids from the composting operation. Included below is a schematic of the composting operation showing the process and typical cross-sections of the cells.
LCSWMA strives for high standards of regulatory compliance when operating the landfill and composting operations. Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) conducts semi-annual inspections and the Old Macon Road Landfill has stayed in consistent compliance with regulatory requirements for ground and surface water, air and land protection, methane gas, daily operations and composting. Groundwater and methane are monitored in accordance with GA EPD requirements. Proper management of the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio and moisture content minimizes odor from composting operations. There has never been an odor complaint by the public. Compost windrows are monitored daily for temperature and oxygen levels. As conditions warrant the windrows are turned to maintain required temperatures and to produce a homogeneous mix. The turning moves the materials from the outside to the inside while fluffing and loosening the material so that it is more porous which allows air to move more freely throughout and accelerate the decomposition process. Materials remain in the active compost area until at least 14 days of 45 degree Celsius temperatures are observed to ensure the control of vectors. Additionally, windrows are maintained at 55 degrees Celsius for a minimum of 15 consecutive days to ensure that the finished product is virtually pathogen free. Stormwater runoff from the active composting area is managed like other stormwater generated on the site and is retained in retention ponds. Stormwater runoff from the facility may be used to add moisture to the compost or is discharged from the site. LCSWMA carefully follows the GA EPD rules for testing the compost for heavy metals, salmonella, and fecal coliform. To further ensure public safety, samples of the finished compost are collected per the protocol of the U.S. Composting Council and shipped to a laboratory for analysis. The animal mortality composting operation is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture which inspects the facility semi-annually. Screening is not required of the high grade biosolids and food composting product, however, the animal mortality composting product must be screened to eliminate anything that resembles animal parts, such as bones or antlers. The landfill contracts the screening process with a screening equipment provider who brings the screener onsite and screens the product until it is a fine and rich finished product ready for land application.
In 1996, GA EPD permitted 90 acres of the Old Macon Road Landfill to receive MSW. The original landfill plan called for three phases of construction; however, phase I and phase III were ultimately built to accommodate the amount of waste that they were receiving from the community and because funding was available. The design of phase I included 60 cells and 25 have been constructed to date. Phase II includes space for future cells. As soon as the landfill opened, the need for space to receive C&D waste became evident and the landfill master plan was modified to convert phase III into a C&D landfill which comprises 15 acres of the permitted 90 acres. Management pays close attention to compaction techniques and densities in order to maximize the air space available; however, since the current MSW landfill has only 31 years of remaining air space, it became necessary to consider ways of diverting certain types of waste out of the traditional waste stream. LCSWMA has established a goal of reducing their waste stream by 25 percent by 2020 through an integrated program of PET bottle recycling, single stream recycling, as well as composting biosolids, animal mortality and food waste. LCSWMA is preparing a major modification to their solid waste permit that will increase the air space of the existing landfill by 42 years. The proposed modification includes adding 20 acres to their C&D landfill, which has approximately two years of air space left, and redesigning the final cap of the MSW landfill to include tack-on berms at closure which will eliminate space consuming terraces during filling. The proposed modification will extend the life of the LCSWMA facility through the year 2085. Planning ahead in terms of long-term sustainability of the landfill space, improved operations and reduction of the waste stream, LCSWMA initiated the permitting of biosolids and yard waste composting at the landfill in 2007. Approved in June 2008 by GA EPD, the Old Macon Road Landfill became the first landfill in the state to obtain a permit to compost biosolids and yard waste. Before 2008, the landfill received over 2,000 tons of biosolids annually from the City of Dublin Water Pollution Control Plant annually which was disposed in the Subtitle “D” compliant MSW landfill. The City of Dublin’s yard waste was ground and piled at a separate location from the MSW landfill. While this ground up material was offered to citizens free of charge, the mulch contained various weed and grass seeds that had not been destroyed through proper composting practices. Now biosolids and yard waste are transported to the landfill where they are combined in the compost mixing area and eventually turned into useable and saleable compost. Since 2008, LCSWMA has received an average of 2,300 tons of biosolids annually. Additional minor permit modifications were initiated and approved in 2009 by GA EPD for the composting of food waste, animal mortality waste, waxed cardboard, sawdust and dry wall. Animal mortality composting, usually limited to agricultural facilities, brought LCSWMA under regulation of the Georgia Department of Agriculture.
There were no significant start-up costs for the composting operation since biosolids were already accepted at the landfill and because existing lined cells, equipment, and personnel were used for the operation. Feedstocks are received at designated drop-off areas. At adjacent mixing areas, feedstock is mixed and windrows are formed. Initially, compost windrows were formed and turned the “old fashioned” way with onsite equipment, mainly the rubber-tired front end loader. Although this front end loader windrow-turning an hour to turn can now be turned in 15 minutes. Because of the improved efficiencies, more finished product can be generated in less time. Currently half of the product is used onsite for landfill maintenance purposes, but it is also available to the public for $10.00 per ton. Onsite the product is used to jump start vegetation growth on the landfill slopes, for erosion control, and for site beautification projects. Noticeably more vigorous vegetation grows in those areas where the LCSWMA-produced compost has been used. Finished compost is moved to a storage area as defined by the composting permit where it can be loaded into the trucks and trailers of farmers, citizen gardeners, local nurseries and Laurens County Recreation Authority sites.

LCSWMA composites food and animal mortality waste which diverts two other waste streams from the landfill,
extends the life of the landfill and increases the amount of saleable finished compost. All waste generators pay $33.50 per ton to bring these feedstocks to the landfill. LCSWMA can accept feedstocks from outside of the County, as long as it is not going to the landfill as “waste”, but rather into the composting facility as “feedstock”, such as in the case of a slaughter house in Bleckley County.

A food composting pilot program began in August 2012 at one of the local schools. A typical school has five dumpsters, three of which include single-stream recycling and one which contains food waste from cafeterias. The schools’ waste volume going into the landfill will be reduced by almost 85 percent due to recycling and reuse. In addition to the benefit to the landfill, this program can also reduce the frequency of the schools’ regular garbage pick-up service, further saving money while reducing their overall carbon footprint. When the program rolled out this fall, LCSWMA hoped that its success would cause other schools, institutions, hospitals, grocery stores and restaurants to join in the program as feedstock contributors – and they have! In February 2013, this program was expanded to an additional school generating an average of 780 pounds/week of food residuals and a Department of Corrections facility that averages 6.8 tons of food residual per week.

Animal mortality composting program began in 2009. This process involves placing animal carcasses from farms, road kill, deer and other meat processing operations into a large windrow covering each layer with approximately 12 inches of mulched yard waste as if you were making lasagna. This process is called static pile composting because the windrows remain untouched for 6 to 9 months--“set it and forget it”-- before being broken down into smaller, manageable windrows. Static piles are anaerobic, but become aerobic when broken down into windrows. Because the windrows are transformed into an aerobic system before turning, odors are minimized and the resulting finished compost is comparable to that produced in the biosolids operation.

Since 2008, over 9,184 tons of biosolids waste has been diverted from the landfill. This biosolids diversion has resulted in a savings of $340,000 worth of landfill air space or 15,500 cubic yards. Since 2009, over 221 tons of animal mortality waste has been diverted from the landfill. This diversion resulted in a savings of $7,500 worth of landfill air space or 400 cubic yards. Overall the recycling and composting programs will save $5.9 million in air space or 287,750 cubic yards over the currently permitted life of the landfill.
In 2011, LCSWMA purchased a Mid-West Bio-Systems’ Aeromaster BT-130 windrow turner to tow behind the facility’s existing 90-horsepower Kubota tractor. An advantage of the new windrow turner is that the turning auger can actually be raised into a vertical position allowing for the equipment to turn around and be maintained easier or to just raise the turner mid-windrow if there is a mechanical problem. In 2012, a new tractor was added to the fleet to provide backup in case the primary tractor needs repairs or maintenance. This backup equipment helps insure that the composting operation runs continuously.

For the food feedstock which is picked up at the local Dublin city schools, the LCSWMA utilizes existing trucks and personnel. Three 95 gallon roll carts are placed at each school to contain their food residuals.
Out of the ten employees at the landfill, eight hold state certifications as landfill operators, including Michael Snipes, the Solid Waste Director. According to Mr. Snipes, for a facility of that size, a team management approach works best where all employees pitch in to get whatever needs to be done accomplished. Employees are given “ownership” in the various tasks and programs which leads to a high degree of pride in their work. Their certifications are kept up to date and they attend SWANA-sponsored training workshops on pertinent topics, such as composting. The landfill employees participate in weekly tailgate safety meetings, covering relevant topics such as trench safety and accident reporting. They also participate in the SWANA-GA Chapter Annual Road-E-O Event and they were host to the International SWANA Road-E-O in 2011.

In 2009, Michael Snipes attended the SWANA Certification Workshop for Composting and received his SWANA Certification as a Composting Systems Manager. This was a voluntary effort as the composting certifications are not required by GA EPD. Four other employees have attended composting training seminars through the Georgia Recycled Organics Council and the Georgia Recycling Coalition. To demonstrate their commitment to all of their recycling and reuse programs, Ralph Brooks, was appointed to serve as the Recycling Coordinator in 2009. He works with community and business partners to make sure all the programs are working smoothly. He appears regularly at civic and community organizations to continually tout LCSWMA’s green effort and gain more acceptance and participation from the citizens, schools, institutions, and businesses.
Laurens County Solid Waste Management Authority’s goal is to maintain a high level of service to the community as well as being good stewards of the environment. The Authority’s proactive and innovative recycling and reuse program exemplifies public and private partnerships that are imperative to have successful results. The program has several facets which include a single-stream recycling program; an old corrugated cardboard (OCC) recycling program; an electronics recycling program; and the GA-EPD approved composting facility at the Laurens County Old Macon Road Landfill. LCSWMA actively encourages recycling through promotion, public participation and education. LCSWMA personnel set up booths and bring the LCSWMA stars & stripes-painted recycling trailer to events like the Quail Unlimited Sporting Clays Shooting tournament and Bike Ride Across Georgia base camp. Additionally, LCSWMA personnel work with student groups who participate in competitive events like the Youth Environmental Symposium at Zoo Atlanta.

In 2008 with the cooperation of SP Recycling and SP Newsprint, LCSWMA began a single-stream recycling program through which co-mingled recyclables are collected at residences and businesses and transported to an enclosed facility where recyclables are sorted and sold or used as feedstock in various manufacturing processes. When making the public announcement of the single-stream recycling program, Michael Snipes, the Solid Waste Director, said, “This program will help us keep recyclable material out of the landfill, saving valuable landfill space and adding life to the landfill.” The program has not only had the direct benefit of saving precious landfill space, but has enhanced public and private partnerships that are critical for successful implementation of these programs.

The composting facility, the first in the state to be approved at a landfill for composting biosolids and yard waste in June 2008, makes a big contribution when it comes to diverting waste out of the landfill thus conserving air space in the landfill and prolonging the life of the landfill. Almost 2,300 tons of biosolids are received from the Dublin Water Pollution Control Plant annually, but rather than be buried in a traditional landfill cell, biosolids...
are taken to the composting facility where it is mixed with yard waste. Neat windrows are formed and periodically turned. In 2009, GA EPD approved LCSWMA to compost food waste, animal mortality waste, waxed cardboard, sawdust and dry wall. Animal mortality feedstock comes from various sources such as road kill, farms, deer and meat processing companies and is placed into static windrows and layered with yard waste. Eventually, large windrows are broken into smaller windrows and turned prior to testing. This produces a more homogenous product and ensures pathogen reduction.

The nearly-finished animal mortality compost goes through a screening process to remove any large bones or antlers that were not broken down. Once screened, the finished compost has the same texture and appearance as the biosolids compost and, like the biosolids compost, there are no objectionable odors.

Food waste composting operation began in August 2012 with the Dublin City Schools Superintendent’s full endorsement and the cooperation of Hillcrest Elementary School as the pilot test before a full roll out of the program to all of the schools in the county. LCSWMA provides food “feedstock” pick-up services at the school and the containers for their food waste. Eventually, the food waste composting operation will expand to include restaurants, colleges and universities, grocery stores, hospitals and other food providers.

The area where the composting is processed is comprised of neat and straight rows of compost that are properly maintained and turned frequently. Once the compost is finished, it is moved into an approved storage area where it can be easily loaded into trucks to begin a new life cycle. LCSWMA and the citizens of Laurens County and Dublin have demonstrated their green consciousness and environmentally-friendly principles through their contributions and participation in the successful recycling and reuse programs.
Laurens Co. Landfill Saves Millions with Eco-Project

Written by Brittany Gonzalez Published on Tuesday, July 05, 2011 05:16 PM. Posted in Laurens County

The Laurens County Landfill is the first in the state to start a bio-solid composting program. The innovative process keeps fees down for customers and helps the landfill earn money.

Solid Waste Director Michael Snipes says “There’s more to this facility then putting trash in the ground and just covering it up with dirt.”

Over the last few years the landfill has collected bio-solids, food, yard clippings, and even road kill for its composting project.

“We chose to do this so that we could save space in the landfill and because operationally it just made sense for us. It helped eliminate any potential odor issues we might experience and just extend the life of the landfill,” says Snipes.

The project has already expanded the life of the landfill by 4 years. It has also produced close to 20,000 pounds of compost, and that has saved more than $340,000 worth of space. By adding 4 extra years the landfill will have saved $3.5 million in its lifetime.

Recycling Coordinator Ralph Brooks says “Air space is valuable. That’s the only commodity we have to sell as a landfill is the space, and once it’s gone it is gone.”

Plus, the landfill sells the composting material at a discounted rate. “We’re selling the material really at a very reduced rate. We’re selling it for $5 a ton for finished compost, which is unheard of,” says Snipes.

This eco-project has helped the landfill win several awards including international ones. Snipes says they’re looking to expand the project even more.
Landfill Turns to Composting Biosolids, Benefits the Community

Posted by Midwest Bio Systems on Thu, Apr 25, 2013 @ 10:38 AM in | 11 digg

Landfills normally become the final resting place for waste, but one landfill in Georgia is quickly turning that stereotype on its head. In addition to receiving waste materials, composting is allowing the Laurens County Landfill to innovate and to give back to the local community, economically and environmentally. At the same time the landfill reaps financial benefits in a win-win situation for all. And it all began with biosolids.

The Laurens County Landfill is a non-profit enterprise that provides disposal services for residents and businesses in Laurens County, Georgia. One of the most important services that it provides to the local community is disposing of the city of Dublin's biosolids, the solid waste that remains after the sewage treatment process. Every year the landfill receives thousands of tons of biosolids, and managing this volatile waste was a challenge.

A common practice among landfills is to mix garbage with biosolids and then to compact this mass which reduces the volume of both the garbage and the biosolids, more than if each was compacted alone. But for the compaction process to work, it requires the proper ratio of biosolids to garbage. This was the problem facing Michael Snipes, director of Solid Waste Management for the Laurens County Landfill.

The biosolids did not arrive in regular delivery intervals, and rarely in the proper ratio for compaction. “You just never knew what to expect. You might go for weeks or months without getting anything, and then all of a sudden you would be inundated with biosolids,” Snipes said, adding that on some days they might receive anywhere between 40 to 100 tons of biosolids. Too many biosolids meant that there might not be enough garbage available to mix for compaction. And too few biosolids meant that they couldn't be compacted. Both situations wasted space in the landfill, and caused a management headache, as well as racking up costs.
The Switch to Composting Biosolids

To Snipes composting, the process of using microorganisms to break down organic matter, seemed like a natural choice for the Lauren's County landfill. It would give him a way to respond to the variable-sized loads of biosolids as they came in, and the composting process would turn the biosolids into a stabilized, rich, soil-like substance that could then be applied on agricultural fields as a fertilizer. Also, diverting this waste would conserve thousands of cubic yards of "air space" in the landfill every year, prolonging the life of the landfill and saving the operation thousands of dollars.

The logistics worked in Snipes's favor. He had access to a large, dependable supply of yard waste to mix with the incoming biosolids to achieve the proper carbon to nitrogen ratio, which is essential to stabilizing the ammonia in the volatile biosolids and manage odor problems.

Another benefit to composting is that Snipes did not have to worry about accumulating too much end product. If he couldn't sell it, the compost could be stockpiled to use as erosion control and as cover in the landfill. "If we couldn't sell it we still have a use for it, and we had plenty of room to store it, so it was not an issue for me. It (composting) increased or improved our operation significantly and at the end of the day we had a use for it, so it was just a win-win for our facility," he said.

After becoming certified as a "composting operations manager" through the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) Snipes made his first batch of compost in 2008 using a front-end loader to turn the windrows. His first efforts were a success, allowing him to divert thousands of tons of biosolids from the landfill. And he began to think about ways to add new waste streams to the program. Animals mortalities became his next focus.

At a SWANA conference Snipes had learned about farmers in the Western United States who were composting agricultural animal mortalities. Snipes felt he could adapt this approach to his operation in Georgia. "It struck me as an opportunity that we could look at because we take in a lot of remnants from deer processing facilities during hunting season," he said. In 2010 he organized his first pilot study, composting 67 tons of animal mortalities. "It worked well for us so we became the first landfill, and currently the only landfill in the state of Georgia, permitted to compost animal mortalities."

The mortalities composting has expanded each year, and it now includes county road kill and agricultural mortalities, giving local farmers and the county government a way to dispose of their animal mortalities. The next big change in Snipes's composting operation was his switch to more efficient equipment to improve the quality of his compost, and reduce costs. To do this he switched to a tractor pulled compost turner.
Using an Aeromaster Compost Turner

In his search for a high-quality compost turner Snipes found Midwest Bio Systems and the Aeromaster compost turner. “I got a good, comfortable, feeling as I talked to the folks at Midwest Bio Systems. I liked the design of the Turner. I liked the paddles as opposed to having the flails. I liked the way it seemed to lift the material without cutting and chopping it.” This efficiency that drew Snipes to the Aeromaster brought immediate results to his program.

These turners work by thoroughly mixing and aerating all the material in compost windrows, evenly blending and mixing every particle, adding oxygen and moisture, all of which contributes to a clean, efficient decomposition process.

“We purchased our (Aeromaster) windrow turner in 2011 and we started seeing immediate improvements in that we were turning out a better product immediately. The mix was just homogenous and the temperatures were constant throughout the entire windrow,” Snipes said, in contrast to the loader. The more homogenous particle size means that this compost can be spread with a manure or litter spreader without the need for screening, he explained.

Creating a high quality product allows the landfill to sell their compost at a competitive price to individuals as well as local farmers who are using it in their crop fertility programs. “We sell a lot cheaper than you should, but we sell it because it benefits people in the community and it benefits the landfill because we are saving that space,” Snipes explained.

Snipes also utilizes the compost extensively for erosion control and as a fertilizer at the landfill. “We have ceased to purchase commercial fertilizer and we have not bought any commercial fertilizer at all since 2011.” Not only has this cut out an expense for Snipes, but the grass is actually growing better with compost as a fertilizer. “We’re actually seeing more vigorous growth in the slopes dressed with compost as opposed to the slopes that we were using topsoil on and chemical fertilizer,” he said.

Compared to the loader, the compost turner has also reduced the costs of Snipes' composting operation. Where it once took eight hours of working time to turn all of the landfill’s compost windrows with a loader, Snipes reports that now they can turn the same amount of material, in one hour with an Aeromaster compost turner. “So we have significant fuel savings, significant labor savings, and obviously it’s less wear and tear on equipment. It allows us to do some other things, and to do a better job, and it really gives us that extra time to keep the site much more neat than it would be if you were out there constantly turning with a loader,” he said.
The compost turner has also meant that Snipes no longer has problems with the loader tires tearing up his clay compost pad which is built on top of the active landfill.

This savings in cost and time means that Snipes does not need to hire additional labor to run his compost site. And the efficiency of the program has also allowed Snipes to consider new ways he can add to his operation. "I see the composting operation as a piece of the recycling puzzle. By having this composting operation in place it offers me some opportunities for further recycling efforts, programs that we cannot do without composting. I think that food waste diversion is going to be the next big phase of our composting operation. It's going to offer some benefits to our citizens that we hadn't seen yet."

This year the landfill has implemented pilot programs in two local schools. "And the composting operation is the sole reason that we're able to do that," Snipes said. "We have also just recently started food waste diversion at a State prison in an adjoining town. So that's offering them some economic benefit, and that benefits everyone within the State because that's tax dollars. Tax dollars are what funds that facility, and that facility funding also includes waste disposal. So if we can offer them a more economical option for diversion or disposal of their waste, than that saves everybody."

Indeed, from increasing the lifespan of the Laurens County Landfill, to offering environmentally and economically efficient options for the citizens of Laurens County, composting on the landfill has been a success.

How much of a success? Snipes said that his facility composes some 2,000 tons of biosolids each year, as well as 4 to 5,000 tons of yard waste, 75 tons of animal mortalities, and food waste, and all of this with no odor issues, whatsoever. "We have been able to manage our material with no odor issues, at all," he reports.

The Georgia chapter of SWANA has recognized Snipes and his landfill for his work, awarding him the 2012 "Composting Systems Excellence Award."

Talking to Snipes it's easy to hear the passion in his voice when he talks about what he does. "I absolutely love my job and I can talk to you about this all week, I can show you and tell you and make suggestions, and take criticisms. We want to improve and make the best product that we can make." Their philosophy is guided by a long-term vision, Snipes explains. "One goal is to maintain that space in the landfill for future generations in our community."