

Compostable Products Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

Meeting #4: Tuesday January 9, 2024 | 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Location: Zoom

Attendance

Members of the Advisory Council, Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), Cascadia Consulting Group (Cascadia), ASTM representatives, and the public attended the meeting.

17 out of 26 Advisory Committee members attended (those who attended are marked with *):

Name	Affiliation
Alex Truelove*	BPI
Amy Clow	WSDA
Patti Stacey	Kittitas County
Chris Averyt	City of Spokane
Dan Corum*	City of Tacoma
Gena Jain*	City of Kirkland
Heather Trim*	Zero Waste Washington
Janet Thoman*	CMA
Jay Blazey*	Cedar Grove
Jenny Slepian*	Eco Products
Kate Kurtz*	City of Seattle
Liv Johansson*	WORC
Lewis Griffith*	City of Tacoma
Ryan Dicks*	Pierce County

Name	Affiliation
Mark Chidester	City of Richland
Reingard Rieger*	Tilth Alliance
Ron Jones*	City of Olympia
Samantha Louderback	Washington Hospitality Association
Samantha Winkle*	Waste Connections
Scott Deatherage*	Barr-Tech
Shannon Pinc	NatureWorks
Alli Kingfisher*	Ecology
Wendy Weiker	Republic Services
Peter Godlewski	Association of WA Businesses
Zonell Tateishi	Yakima County
Rod Whittaker*	WRRRA

3 Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) members attended, but did not participate as Advisory Committee members:

- Cullen Naumoff
- Chery Sullivan

4 staff from Cascadia Consulting Group (Cascadia) attended as meeting facilitators and support:

- Maddie Seibert
- Hannah Swee
- Taylor Magee
- Brent Edgar

6 members of the public attended.

Meeting goals

- Gain a better understanding of ASTM compostable products standards
- Continue challenge identification process
- Review current research surrounding compostable products produced and disposed in WA state and discuss findings

Agenda

Duration	Agenda Item
10 min	Welcome, agenda, & objectives
30 min	ASTM presentation on compostable standards
15 min	Research review, organics waste characterization and list of compostable products sold/ distributed in WA
55 min	Discuss research, continue challenge identification
5 min	Public comment
5 min	Closing remarks and preview next steps

Welcome and Introductions

Maddie began the meeting and welcomed Advisory Committee members. She presented Zoom tips and best practices for the meeting, took attendance, went over the meeting agenda and community agreements, reviewed ways for community members/ members of the public to engage with the Advisory Committee both inside and outside the meeting, and addressed technology tips and a guide to using MURAL, the interactive discussion tool used during the meeting.

ASTM Presentation

The AC welcomed our guest presenters from ASTM, Alyson Fick and Jeanette Hanna. Alyson Fick works for ASTM as the Staff Manager for Committee D20 on Plastics, which oversaw the development of standards for compostability. Jeanette Hanna is the Senior Advocacy and Sustainability Manager for Biopolymers North America and helped establish the standards for compostability. They provided an overview of the ASTM process and the importance of specification standards, noting that ASTM develops voluntary standards which can then be adopted by industry and government. Alyson noted that ASTM has the ability to establish a ‘reading room’ for AC members to read the standards.

- The ASTM standards process engages a balanced stakeholder group, consisting of various producers, users, consumers, and general interest groups.
- The ASTM standards most relevant to the AC reside under Subcommittee D20.96, “Environmentally Degradable Plastics and Biobased Products”, and fall under the administrative section of D20.96.13 “Man-Made Environment Aerobic Degradation/Biodegradation”.
- Jeanette went over the specification requirements for products testing, which include requirements of disintegration, biodegradation, and terrestrial safety.

Questions/ Discussions:

- A member of the public asked: What is the process to remove the 7 inside the Mobius Loop and replace it with a #8 or a C for compost.

- Alyson Fick replied that this comment referred to D7611 which is a resident identification code from ASTM. Anyone can come to ASTM and propose a new number or code be added to D7611. Proposals from organizations have been made, and subsequently denied due to a lack of technical material and data or there was not a strong enough commitment by industry to change the codes.
- A member of the public asked: If the ink on a compostable cup is less than 5% dry basis weight of the entire cup does it need to have heavy metals analysis?
 - Jeanette Hanna replied that components between 1-10% must be tested separately, which is called out in the standards.
- A Committee member commented that it sounded like each component of a product gets tested separately, and asked if there was a requirement for testing the product altogether?
 - Jeanette replied that for biodegradation, all items must be tested separately. She also noted that there are the requirements for the full article, and there is room to determine whether you test jointly or separately. The whole product must pass standard.

Re-Cap

Maddie presented a re-cap of what the AC group has completed and where the group is headed.

- Maddie shared a progress update of what has been completed thus far, including the literature review and analysis of waste characterization results and compostable products registry; and what we're currently working on, facility interviews, continued desktop research, and written information requests. She noted our methods of information sharing as the monthly research memos and provided updates on the **working group to define compostable products, which is scheduled to meet January 22.**
- Maddie shared the feedback received in the December meeting regarding identified challenges to compostable products management:
 - **There is a lot of complexity** in the goal.
 - **Variety of compost techniques and parameters:** Facilities use different composting techniques and even within composting techniques, there are many parameters that influence how quickly items break down.
 - **Compost standards may not reflect conditions on the ground** at facilities; not all composters trust the standards.
 - **Consumer confusion is a major issue** and cause of contamination.
 - **Education is difficult** in multi-family settings and commercial sectors.
 - **Lookalike products cause issues:** Compostable products that look like non-compostable plastic alternatives increase consumer confusion, contaminate compost, and obscure the extent to which compostable products break down.
 - **There is not yet enough funding** for HB1799 and composting education and measures.

Research Review

Hannah presented the January research memo, which included results and analysis from the 2022-2023 statewide organics study data and producer declared compostable products list. This research worked to

answer the question: “Out of the amount and types of compostable products generated, how much of each type are ending up at commercial compost facilities?”

- Significant findings from the composter declared compostable products list show that there are 168 registered products, with bags making up a significant portion of the products and PLA being a major material type.
- Significant findings from the 2022-2023 statewide organics study note that by weight, compostable products are a small fraction of material disposed in residential organics. Hannah noted that weight may not accurately reflect the impact of the presence of compostable products in the organics stream due to their light weight. She also pointed to the lack of commercial sector data.
- Hannah presented next research steps, and highlighted [recent news coming from California](#) surrounding their acceptance of compostable products.
- Discussion/ Questions:
 - A Committee member asked if the January research memo was in the EZ View, Maddie replied that it is: [EZ View](#)
 - A Committee member asked: is there a guide/resource for declaring products that anyone is aware of? Many individuals replied in the chat with the resources below:
 - [Plastic Product Degradability - Producer Declaration Walkthrough](#)
 - [Compostable product labeling requirements - Washington State Department of Ecology](#)

Research Discussion

The Committee was then divided into two breakout rooms to discuss the January research memo. The group discussed these guiding questions:

1. What does this research tell us about what is working to achieve “*the state’s goal of managing organic materials, including food waste, in an environmentally sustainable way that increases food waste diversion and ensure that finished compost is clean and marketable?*”
2. What does it tell us about what is not working to achieve the state’s goal?
3. Where do we see opportunities and barriers to improve compostable products management in Washington state?
4. In what areas do we still need more information to move this committee’s work forward?
5. Are there findings that do not align with your experience? If so, what is the difference?

Themes synthesized from MURAL board responses are below. Please see the Appendix for full responses.

1. What does this research tell us about what is working to achieve “the state’s goal of managing organic materials, including food waste, in an environmentally sustainable way that increases food waste diversion and ensure that finished compost is clean and marketable?”
 - Research shows that contamination rates are low.
 - No data to demonstrate the end-market side and if the resulting compost product is clean and marketable.

- Capture rates, the percentage of material going to OMM facilities compared to landfill, are needed to better understand how the state can improve food waste diversion.
 - Contamination is measured by weight, which is deceptive given the low weight of compostable products.
2. What does it tell us about what is not working to achieve the state's goal?
 - The state is not diverting very much food waste, especially when compared to yard waste, both in total and as a percentage of total waste.
 - More facilities are needed in other regions of the state.
 - Lack of commercial data leads to the question of how those accounts are managed, and what contamination/diversion rates are there.
 - There could be public perception barriers.
 - Need more detailed information on the composition of contaminants.
 3. Where do we see opportunities and barriers to improve compostable products management in Washington state?
 - There is an opportunity to see what happens in CA regarding their acceptance of compostable products.
 - There is an opportunity to increase education efforts on composting and compostable products. Education could hopefully address consumer barriers such as "wishful composting," but additional action to make items accepted and bins across jurisdictions consistent.
 - This process presents an opportunities for the state to take the time and implement evidence-based policy, which could have positive effects on diversion and lesson contamination.
 - A barrier faced is facility capacity and siting, issues that are pronounced in rural areas.
 - Members raised questions of whether compostable products may facilitate more impacts related to plastic contamination in compost than related to food waste diversion rates.
 4. In what areas do we still need more information to move this committee's work forward?
 - What are acceptable levels of contamination to consumers?
 - How can the state better support compost facilities?
 - What are the ideal conditions to fully breakdown compostable products?
 - Facility interviews will be crucial in addressing this question as well as questions regarding observed contamination.
 - Data on the impacts of including compostable products on the quality and marketability of compost finished product, as well as effects to the system as a whole.
 - Data on if allowing compostable products increases the amount of lookalike contaminants.
 - We need industry and commercial sector data.
 - Are compostable products contaminating the recycling stream?
 5. Are there findings that do not align with your experience? If so, what is the difference?
 - Reports of compostable products showing up in end product as contamination despite meeting standards.
 - Observed higher contamination rates than what was noted in the research.

Public Comment

- I live in Kirkland in a condominium complex with about 120 units. The compost bin was removed a couple years ago, I contacted the property management company and was informed that rodents were getting into bin. Is this a common issue with bins being removed and are there methods to address rodents and compost bins. How often does this occur?
 - Maddie replied that she was unsure if our current research covers this, but the facilitation team will flag this for upcoming research.
 - A Committee member replied that pulling carts for rodent reasons is not a common occurrence, and that decision would typically come from the property management side.
- Do we know how the regulations and rules regarding labeling will be enforced come July 1? Will consumers be reporting?
 - Alli Kingfisher replied that we will document this question in the meeting summary for future research.

Next Steps

Maddie covered the Advisory Committee's next steps including upcoming meeting dates. The **February AC meeting will take place on February 6th from 10:00am-12:00pm**, and the **workgroup meeting to discuss a working definition for compostable products will be on January 22**.

Appendix, MURAL Board Activity

Breakout Room 1: Maddie		Discussion Summary:												
Research Review Discussion		Do compostable products invite more contamination? Do they cause significant contamination?												
Please use the questions below to guide our discussion of the January Research Memo as well as the ASTM presentation. If you have any comments specifically related to a topic, please indicate which topic you are referring to on the board.		Food and compostable product weights in the compost stream are low - education and consistency is needed.												
This is an opportunity for evidence-based policy. Need to question assumptions. Interviews with facilities will be critical.		Still a long way to go with diverting food and contamination is low, but it doesn't capture the end market side - is it marketable? How has this impacted compost prices and volume sold?												
1. What does this research tell us about what is working to achieve "the state's goal of managing organic materials, including food waste, in an environmentally sustainable way that increases food waste diversion and ensure that finished compost is clean and marketable?"	Like recycling, our system works well for processing the vast majority of materials, but some products that make up a small amount of the waste stream create problems for the whole system.	There is a low amount of contamination									Still a long way to go with diverting food and contamination is low, but it doesn't capture the end market side - is it marketable? How has this impacted compost prices and volume sold?			
2. What does it tell us about what is not working to achieve the state's goal?	Yard waste collection is solid, but I do not see indication that food waste diversion is even on the radar.	There may be some public perception (diverting food to gross, etc) barriers to capturing food. Also- multifamily access?	There is not reliable information on the materials that are coming from commercial accounts	Residential organics tons appear low in relation to commercial tons	How are commercial organics being managed? Especially large generators - agriculture, food processors, etc.									Do compostable products facilitate more plastic contamination of compost than they facilitate composting of food?

3. Where do we see opportunities and barriers to improve compostable products management in Washington state?	Compostable products are still such a tiny part of what ends up in a compost, indicating we need better education to keep them out of landfill.	From the small percentage of food that is being diverted, there is a big opportunity to educate on the basic level of what should go into the compost.	Facility capacity and doing will be a challenge. We need more facilities and they are expensive, difficult to site, and often opposed by the community.	The biggest barrier is facility capacity. We need more facilities or bigger facilities. Contamination is secondary.	There is opportunity for WA to retroactively implement policies that address the right thing - the way things are of food waste diversion and compostable, but we have to be committed to doing.	Paper may be more valuable to keep in the recycling stream.	Education can go only so far and it is still too complicated. The likelihood of a non-compostable product landing in compost could increase if only compostables would be avoided for certain scenarios (e.g. take-away food).	Consumer confusion also includes "wishful" composting.	Food waste brings contamination with it.	Compostable products are one of many contaminants in composting.	Better to throw away all compostable products than address composting?
4. In what areas do we still need more information to move this committee's work forward?	Would like to hear from composters on their view of contamination, products that break down, etc.	Interviews with facility operators will be crucial for evaluating how the standards apply to real world conditions.	There is a discrepancy between what compost facilities observe and what the tests indicate about compostability.	There is an opportunity for the state to implement evidence-based policy. Take the appropriate time to get it right.	It is vital to support policy with research. The timeline of this Committee work is short, esp. for the research.	Assumptions about this system are not necessarily true, but are being used to pass bills. Ex: paper will always break down (not always true).	There are rules that are different between different policies - confusing and can lead people to just check out.	Ex: if one community accepts food and another accepts food soiled paper.	It can be confusing to have long lists of what is acceptable in composting.	Do compostable products facilitate more plastic contamination of compost than they facilitate composting of food?	There might be more compostable products in the compost stream depending on decisions this group and the state make
5. Are there findings that do not align with your experience? If so, what is the difference?	The CalRecycle decision is one view, but what are WA composters capable of processing? Isn't that more relevant?	How much of compostable products are contaminating recycling stream?	What is the overall environmental benefit or cost of accepting compostables to the whole system?	How many compostable products actually break down in commercial facilities?	Reports of experience with compostable products showing up in end products contamination despite meeting standards.	Usually see a lot more true plastic and garbage that composters have to manage.					

Breakout Room #2: Hannah

Research Review Discussion

Please use the questions below to guide our discussion of the January Research Memo as well as the ASTM presentation. If you have any comments specifically related to a topic, please indicate which topic you are referring to on the board.

Discussion Summary:

More data, specifically on capture rates and commercial rates and multi family.

Digging into the relationship between food waste diversion, compostable products, and contamination.

<p>1. What does this research tell us about what is working to achieve "the state's goal of managing organic materials, including food waste, in an environmentally sustainable way that increases food waste diversion and ensure that finished compost is clean and marketable?"</p>	<p>We need capture rates to understand how we are doing to work towards the state's goal of managing organic materials, including food waste.</p>	<p>ASTM brings together diverse and expert voices, develops by consensus</p>	<p>Compostable products are a vast minority of overall organic waste (a good thing?)</p>	<p>Capture rates: percentage of a material going to an OMM facility. look at whats going to OMM and landfill, just looking at OMM facilities doesn't capture whole picture</p>	<p>Contamination is measured by weight so packaging vs product is deceptive.</p>	<p>lack of commercial and industrial data- presents data gap.</p>
<p>2. What does it tell us about what is not working to achieve the state's goal?</p>	<p>ASTM definitions of compostable requires longer time to break down than many compost facilities currently provide</p>	<p>We're not diverting much food waste, especially compared to yard waste (total, but I suspect also as a %)</p>	<p>We need more facilities/ collection capacity in other regions of the state</p>	<p>We don't understand very well the composition of the contaminants (compostable v non-compostable)</p>	<p>More food waste and compostable service ware is ending up in landfills than OMM facilities- major issue. (capture rates)</p>	
<p>3. Where do we see opportunities and barriers to improve compostable products management in Washington state?</p>	<p>input from facilities that currently accept compostables and ones that no longer do</p>	<p>Improved data on compliance rate for declaring compostable products</p>	<p>Interesting to watch what California is doing (banning compostables)</p>	<p>Facility siting is a challenge for collection in rural areas - both permitting or distance to facilities - there are many issues.</p>		
<p>4. In what areas do we still need more information to move this committee's work forward?</p>	<p>data on if including compostable products as acceptable increases the amount of lookalike contaminants in the organics diverted to composting</p>	<p>Acceptable levels of contamination to consumers</p>	<p>How do we support facilities manage compostables?</p>	<p>We need to know which contaminants are most "offensive" to the compost process. E.g. glass shattering</p>	<p>Need to understand how compostable products may or may not help divert more food waste, and if some products are more effective at this than others</p>	<p>Understanding which communities in WA have yard waste collection and want food waste diversion but it have access</p>
<p>5. Are there findings that do not align with your experience? If so, what is the difference?</p>	<p>Data on the impacts of including compostable products on the quality/marketability of compost finished product</p>	<p>What are the operating conditions of compost facilities in WA?</p>		<p>which operating conditions favor the degradation of compostables</p>	<p>understanding divertable food waste via compostables particularly compared to other strategies (does ReFed have this data)</p>	<p>Industry/ commercial sector data on compostable product disposal</p>