

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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Media Release

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Kepernt and Browning Request that DEC Ensure Long Island Compost Comply with Air Quality Standards

County Health Study Points To Potential Health Impacts and DEC Violations

Yaphank, NY- A recently submitted air quality study that was conducted at the direction of the Suffolk County Legislator Kate Browning in conjunction with the Suffolk County Department of Health Services left many questions and intensified concerns of violations at Long Island Compost in Yaphank and other facilities throughout Suffolk County. The county collected air quality data near composting operations in five areas of central Suffolk County. The data collected shows a correlation between the presence of odors and elevated levels of bioaerosol and particulate matter (PM) 2.5 contaminants in the air samples.

Councilwoman Constance Kepernt and Legislator Browning were joined with local civic leaders to call for New York State DEC to take action, and for the Brookhaven Town Board to halt a proposal to close the Papermill Road site in Manorville, which would result in an increase in materials at Yaphank. The study pointed to Long Island Compost in Yaphank as being the worst offender.

Composting is environmentally beneficial when sites are managed correctly. However, when managed incorrectly they pose enormous odor and potential health impacts to nearby residents and those living downwind of the site.

The Suffolk County study took a total of 797 air samples on 37 separate days at five separate composting facilities. According to Suffolk County, "Although this was a preliminary screening and data collection program, the data set collected was robust enough to address the following basic questions:

1. What is the frequency and intensity of downwind odors?
2. Does the occurrence of odor correlate with higher contaminant levels?
3. Where standards exist for an air quality contaminant, is there a potential for exceeding standards?"

Odors were detected at 54% in the events tested. Results collected during this study also indicated a real potential of facilities exceeding the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). These are small particulates that when inhaled get lodged in the lungs, and can result in asthma and other respiratory problems. Elevated counts of viable bioaerosols, both fungal spores and bacteria, were also recorded.

Composting sites are considered solid waste facilities and fall under the jurisdiction of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The DEC's air regulations prohibit the emission of odorous, toxic substances that unreasonably interfere with the enjoyment of property. Unreasonably interfere is interpreted as odors in the community greater than 20% of the time.

The areas studied by the county included both the Long Island Compost site in Yaphank and the Papermill Road site in Manorville. According to the Suffolk County study, all of the composting facilities studied with the exception of the Bellport compost facility exceed the 20% threshold. As depicted in the chart on p. 8 of the county study, Long Island Compost facility is by far the worst offender with odors detected in 77.8% of the samples taken. In contrast, the town's Manorville site exceeded the DEC threshold by only 5% with odors detected 25% of the time.

The county concluded that the Papermill Road Compost facility appeared to be generally well managed, whereas both Long Island Compost and Global Land Materials had the highest PM 2.5 and bioaerosol levels. These issues appear associated with grinding operations at these facilities.

Councilwoman Kepert and Legislator Browning are calling on Town Board members to seriously consider this information when casting their vote at the July 20 Town Board meeting on the closure of the Manorville Compost facility. "By closing the Manorville Compost facility, the town will be an accomplice to Long Island Compost's egregious violations; and I just can't support that," stated Councilwoman Kepert.

"I sponsored legislation in 2006 that directed our Department of Health Services to conduct air quality tests because there were concerns about these facilities' impacts on surrounding communities," stated Legislator Browning. "While composting is necessary, the findings clearly show that compost operations have negative impacts on the quality of life for surrounding areas, and Long Island Compost is the worst offender. New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation must take steps to guarantee these facilities are complying with state law, and if they are not, the state needs to take aggressive action to make sure they come into compliance. We also need to take a hard look at determining what locations are appropriate for this needed activity."

Where there is compost there is odor; this is a reality that some compost facilities manage more effectively than others. As the report points out, Manorville Compost facility emits odors or toxic substances that unreasonably interfere with the enjoyment of property 25% of the time whereas Long Island Compost's average is 77.8%. "I find it curious that the DEC came after the Town of Brookhaven when complaints came in and aggressively enforced their regulations but they have not done the same with respect to the egregious violations committed by Long Island Compost Facility," concluded Councilwoman Kepert.

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