



## Better practice composting - Frequently asked questions

### What is an industry-specific guideline?

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) is developing a series of industry-specific guidelines to provide external stakeholders further information on how it carries out its regulatory functions under Part V Division 3 of the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#). Industry-specific guidelines are progressively being developed for some prescribed activities that are listed in Schedule 1 of the [Environmental Protection Regulations 1987](#). The *Guideline: Better practice composting* (the guideline) is the first in the series.

### Why is this the first industry-specific guideline for composting facilities?

The development and publication of guidelines for the construction and operation of compost facilities is an outstanding government commitment following the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Bio-Organics composting facility.

The guideline also seeks to provide regulatory certainty on what is considered 'better practice' as defined in the *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030* ([Waste Strategy 2030](#)) for composting to support the implementation of FOGO ([food organics and garden organics](#)) collection and processing by 2025, as required by the Waste Strategy 2030.

### Was industry consulted in the development of the guideline?

Yes, the department has developed the guideline in collaboration with the Western Australia branch of the Australian Organics Recycling Association.

### What are the benefits?

The guideline provides environmental performance objectives and minimum standards for the construction and operation of compost facilities. The guideline also defines 'better practice' for composting facilities in relation to the [Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2007](#) and [Waste Strategy 2030](#).

The guideline provides greater certainty to industry through a transparent risk-based approach for the requirements of the compost industry:

- to meet their obligations under the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#)
- to demonstrate to the department that their obligations under the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#) are being met

- to define ‘better practice’ and establish how composting facilities can achieve the [Waste Strategy 2030](#) target
- to provide certainty to industry while supporting innovative and dynamic approaches where the risk of impacts are appropriately managed.

### **When does the guideline come into effect?**

Consultation will take place over a six-month period. Following consideration of the consultation feedback the guideline will be published. At the time of publication all new applications for compost facilities must follow the requirements set out in the guideline. The department will work with existing compost facilities to meet the requirements set out in the guideline within a reasonable timeframe.

### **What are ‘environmental performance objectives’?**

Environmental performance objectives generally reflect the requirements of the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#) and provide a link between regulated premises and the governing legislation. The environmental performance objectives frame the outcome for different aspects of the environment and the types of impacts that may arise from composting facilities.

### **What is the Waste Strategy 2030?**

The [Waste Strategy 2030](#) is a requirement of the Waste Authority under Pt 4, Division 1 of the [Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2007](#). The Waste Strategy 2030 outlines targets and strategies to achieve the objectives of waste avoidance, waste recovery and protection of the environment through responsible waste management.

The Waste Strategy 2030 identifies that where waste cannot be avoided, the environment should be protected from the negative impacts of waste by recycling and disposal facilities adopting better practice.

### **What are ‘better practice’ facilities?**

A key target under Objective 3 of the [Waste Strategy 2030](#) is that waste is managed and disposed of to ‘better practice’ facilities by 2030. For this target to be achieved, new premises are expected to meet published better practice requirements and existing premises are expected to improve their standards to align with better practice.

The guideline will set the standard for the regulation of compost manufacturing premises under Pt V of the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#) and also sets the standard for ‘better practice’ composting as defined by the Waste Strategy 2030.

### **What is the waste hierarchy?**

The [waste hierarchy](#) ranks waste management options in order of their general environmental desirability, from avoidance as the most preferred option, through various resource recovery options, to the least preferred option of disposal. Compost facilities provide the opportunity for the recovery, reprocessing and re-use of wastes that may otherwise be disposed of.

### **Will all compost facilities need to be ‘better practice’ by 2030?**

Yes, all existing compost facilities will need to meet better practice by 2030. The department will provide a reasonable timeframe for existing premises to achieve this objective.

### **Can I deviate from the minimum standards?**

Yes, as long as the relevant environmental performance objective is still met. The department supports applicants and existing licence holders to develop and propose alternative controls to the minimum standards outlined in the guideline. This approach allows for growth and innovation within industry and encourages practical, site-specific solutions suited to local conditions.

The responsibility lies with the applicant to clearly demonstrate how they will meet the relevant environmental performance objective when alternative controls are proposed. Any deviation from the minimum standards set out in the guideline must demonstrate that the relevant environmental performance objective has been met.

### **I store compost. Does the guideline apply to me?**

No, but there may be aspects of the guideline that are useful to consider in managing your facility and meeting your obligations under the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#).

### **My facility is a Category 67A prescribed premises that only blends soils, no composting takes place. Does the guideline apply to me?**

No, but there may be aspects of the guideline that are useful to consider in managing your facility and meeting your obligations under the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#).

### **I think the minimum standards are excessive for my composting facility. Do I have to meet them all?**

No, not all minimum standards may have to be met. Deviation from the minimum standards is acceptable as long as you demonstrate that the relevant environmental performance objective has been met.

## **I have an existing compost manufacturing facility that can produce more than 1,000 tonnes per year. What should I do?**

If you have been granted a licence under Pt V of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* you should review the draft guideline, undertake a self-assessment and engage in the consultation process.

If you do not hold a licence under Pt V of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*, in addition to the recommendation above, you should refer to the [Guideline: Industry regulation guide to licensing](#), complete an [Application form](#) and contact the department if you have any further enquiries.

## **Why is the department regulating the produce of compost facilities?**

Where the inputs to the composting process are not fit for purpose or the compost process is not completed effectively, the produce may still be considered a waste and present risks to environmental values, water resources and human health. Further information is available in [Factsheet – Assessing whether material is a waste](#).

## **Why is the department regulating the quality of compost produce?**

The department will regulate the quality of compost produce with regards to managing the risks to environmental values, water resources and human health. This includes ensuring that the composting process has been undertaken and completed effectively to manage the risks from higher-risk waste streams (e.g. liquid wastes).

Compost producers are responsible for ensuring that the maturity level and beneficial qualities of compost products are suitable for their intended end use.

The department will require compost producers to demonstrate that compost products do not present an unacceptable risk to the environment and human health when used for their intended purpose. This can be achieved by:

- complying with the *Australian Standard AS 4454-2012: Compost, soil conditioners and mulches* and *Western Australian Guidelines for biosolids management*, or
- developing and maintaining of a fit-for-purpose assessment report.

## **I operate a piggery (or other prescribed activity) and compost the waste on my premises. Does the guideline apply to me?**

Yes, if you undertake operations that meet the definition of a Category 67A compost manufacturing facility on the premises the guideline applies to you.

**Is the mulching of green waste covered by the guideline?**

The definition of composting in the guideline includes mulching. If mulching is the only activity being undertaken at your premises, not all of the guideline will be relevant to you.

**I have an existing compost manufacturing facility that is within the siting standard (e.g. separation distances) set out in section 10 of the guideline. Do I have to close?**

Existing premises that are within the siting standards (e.g. within the Peel Inlet-Harvey Estuary Environmental Protection Policy area or groundwater separation distance) may pose an increased risk to receptors and may be required to implement controls over and above the minimum standards set out in the guideline. You will have to detail the controls that are or will be implemented and demonstrate that these are sufficient to achieve the environmental performance objective.

**If I need to make improvements to my premises to meet the requirements of the guideline, taking into consideration that managing FOGO is a State Government priority, will funds be available to support me to make these improvements?**

At this time, funding commitments are to local government authorities to implement a three-bin kerbside collection system in the Perth and Peel region by 2025. [Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2007](#) funds that are not taken up through this commitment may become available to support compost facilities in the future, subject to the normal approval process for the Waste Authority annual business plan.

**What is the department doing about unlicensed operators who are not meeting the requirements of the guideline and undercutting legitimate businesses?**

The department will investigate any premises known to be operating prescribed activities such as compost manufacturing facility. The department can be notified of such activities on 08 6364 7000, via the Pollution Watch hotline on 1300 784 782 or email via [info@dwer.wa.gov.au](mailto:info@dwer.wa.gov.au). The department will take action in accordance with the [draft Compliance and enforcement policy](#).