

Frequently asked questions





Is there a problem with heavy metals in the product?

Applications of our product are managed to ensure there are no adverse effects to the soil. Concern surrounding heavy metals in sludge stem from the days of heavy industry and pre-regulation (1989). Metal discharges into the sewerage system are now tightly controlled by Trade Effluent Inspectors and as a result levels have fallen significantly from 20 years ago. Consequently the Sludge Use (in Agriculture) Regulations determine that heavy metal levels are tightly monitored to assure safety in the food chain. In fact the metals found in our products at the rates applied, are much more likely to rectify trace element deficiencies than cause toxic effects.

Does the operation result in soil compaction?

What happens if it's wet weather?

The spreading equipment has low ground pressure tyres to reduce damage to the structure of the soil. Like any operation, if carried out at the wrong time in inappropriate conditions it will lead to compaction. Our Service Delivery Managers continuously oversee the work and are in close contact with both the contractors and farmer customers. If working conditions are felt to be unsuitable we will halt operations in order to prevent damage.

What does it cost to have the product?

Your Service Delivery Manager will be able to discuss with you the costs involved. You will be given a cost per hectare, which will not change, so you will know the savings you can make before you commit to anything. Our costing structure is reflective of when the product is in most demand, with higher costs typically incurred during late summer and early autumn. Often significant savings can be made if you have land that is available for spreading outside of peak demand.

How is the product treated?

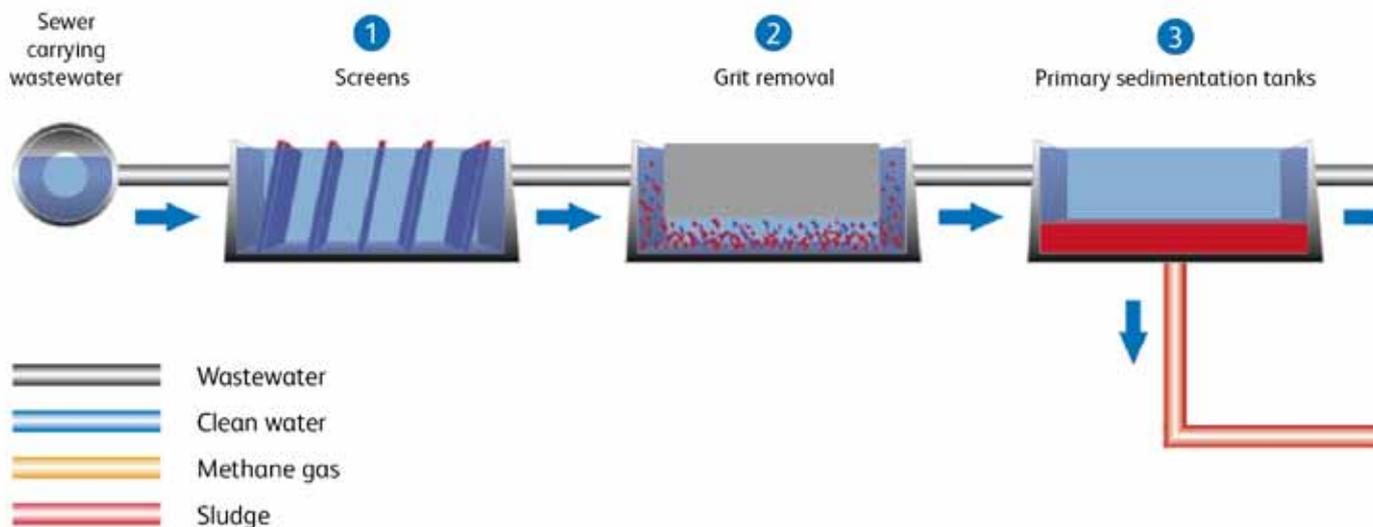
Sludges for recycling to agriculture are defined in various ways, but essentially fall into three categories: "untreated", "treated" and "advanced treated" as defined in the Safe Sludge Matrix. The types of biosolids include liquids (about 5% dry matter), cakes (about 25% dry matter) and a range of other products including composted and lime-stabilised materials. Certain products are only available in restricted areas.

Will I be able to sell my crop if I apply the product?

In conjunction with Water UK (representing the water industry) and the British Retail Consortium (representing the major supermarket retailers), Thames Water helped develop the Safe Sludge Matrix to ensure the safe application of biosolids to land. The matrix provides clear guidance on the use of biosolids on particular crops whilst ensuring the highest possible standards of food safety. This provides retailers and the food industry confidence that biosolids reuse on agricultural land is safe.

For further information on the Safe Sludge Matrix please visit www.adas.co.uk

Depending on how you market your crop and whether there are any specific contractual requirements referring to biosolid applications may determine whether you are able to use our product. If you are in any doubt then please do not hesitate to contact your Service Delivery Manager for further information.





What about odour problems? Will it affect my neighbours?

The location of a stockpile is carefully chosen in order to minimise the potential impact associated with the product on your neighbours. We take great care when spreading the product and attempt to work in favourable conditions taking into account wind direction and proximity of local housing. When deemed necessary we use an odour control in the spreader. We ask that the product be incorporated within 24 hours of spreading to minimise any unpleasant odours. Throughout our operations we work closely with the local Environmental Health team and if you receive any complaints from neighbours do not hesitate to contact your Service Delivery Manager.

Is the product organic?

Despite sewage sludge comprising a high level of organic material, the Soil Association (certification authority for organic farming) stipulate in its rulings that sewage sludge cannot be applied on organic farms. For more information please visit the Soil Association website www.soilassociation.org

My farm is in an NVZ. Can I still apply the product?

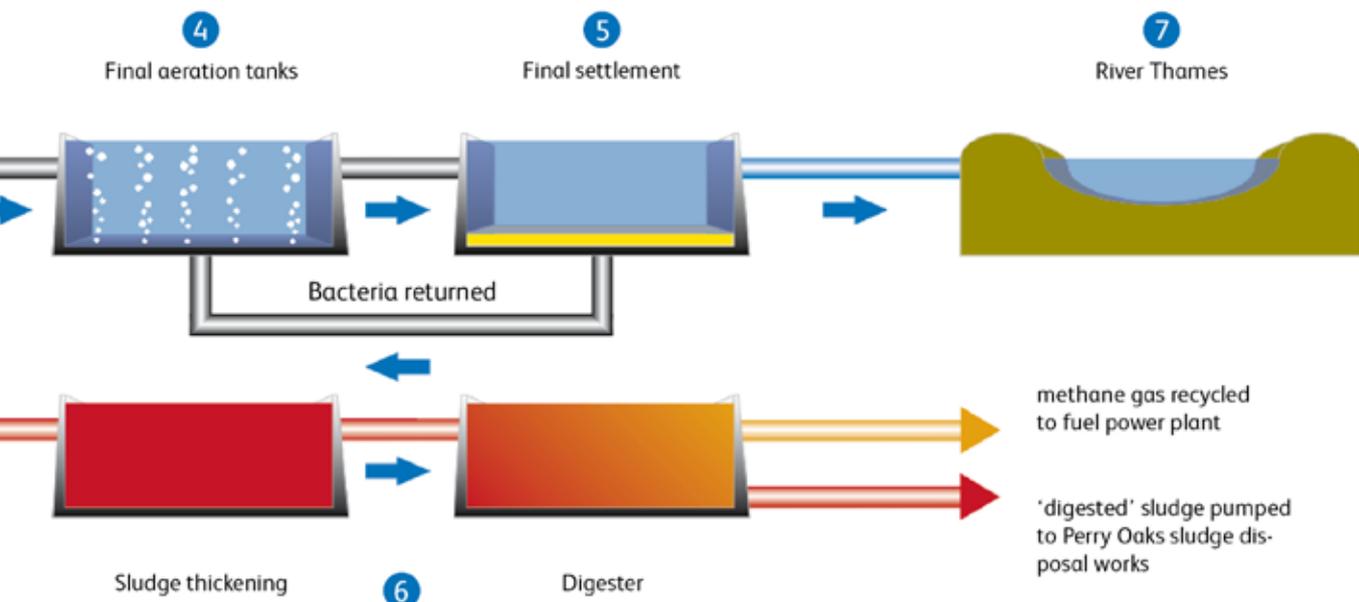
Yes, as part of the revised NVZ rules organic manures can be spread on individual fields at a rate up to 250kg N/ha in any 12-month period. It is important to inform your Service Delivery Manager of any other sources of organic manures which have been applied to your land. Your Service Delivery Manager will help calculate the rate at which biosolids can be spread to ensure total nitrogen supplied to any field does not exceed 250kg/ha in a 12-month period. You will be provided with full details of nutrient additions for each treatment for your accurate record keeping. Our liquid product is classed as having high readily available nitrogen content and cannot therefore be spread during closed periods. For more information on the NVZ rules and closed periods please visit the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk

Can I spread the product on beans or peas?

Beans and peas are both legume crops and as such are capable of fixing atmospheric nitrogen naturally in the soil. Therefore these crops do not require a supply of nitrogen from manures or fertilisers. As the product contains a supply of nitrogen, it should not be applied to land where legume crops will be grown. For more information please refer to the Fertiliser Recommendations for Agricultural and Horticultural Crops (RB209).

Do I have to test the soil before the product is applied? Are there any soil limits that may prevent application?

In accordance with legislation, before we apply any of our products to agricultural land we take soil samples. Thames Water carries out this work at no extra cost to the farmer. 25 soil cores are taken for analysis from each 5 hectare unit of land. There are soil limits that may prevent application and we therefore work closely with the Environment Agency and DEFRA to make certain we comply with legislation.





Will the product come from my local sewage works?

There are 349 sewage treatment works in the Thames Water region and over 50 sludge centres. Sludge may be hauled from a variety of works depending on various factors including stock levels and logistics. We try wherever possible to reduce haulage distances in order to minimise costs and improve the efficiency and speed of delivery to land.

What if I already have high soil nutrients but just want the organic matter?

Applications of biosolids can help maintain or enhance levels of soil organic matter, which is vital to the sustainable management of soils. Building levels of soil organic matter will help improve the soils structure, which in turn enhances root growth leading to healthier plants and higher yields.

However you must also account for the nutrient inputs when applying biosolids to land. Applying biosolids will reduce the need for fertiliser, as nutrients in the product will become available in the first year. Your Service Delivery Manager will be able to provide you with the details of the nutrient content of the product, which is important to note for your own record keeping. Under the current NVZ rulings a maximum of 250kg of total organic nitrogen can be applied per hectare in a single field.

Are any special precautions required when working in fields that have had biosolids applied to them?

Recycling biosolids to land is safe and environmentally friendly. The risks associated with the application of biosolids are similar to the risks associated with other products applied to land, whether organic or inorganic. If handling the product, ensure appropriate personal protective clothing is worn and wash hands after handling to prevent accidental ingestion.

Is it legal?

Application of any waste to land is now strictly regulated. All Our recycling operations are subject to a number of regulations and codes of practises (including Sludge use in Agriculture 1989 and the safe sludge matrix), which are monitored and audited by the Environmental Agency. We also work closely with English Heritage, English Nature, Local and National Government Environmental Health Officers, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), this ensures we remain at the forefront of any change in legislation and working practises, in order to meet the current and future standards.

Do I need to inform anyone?

As part of our rigorous due diligence assessment and environmental checks we will complete all of the necessary forms and exemptions and inform all the relevant third parties on your behalf. All of our Biosolid applications are registered with the EA.

To complete our full audit trail of service after we have applied the biosolids we will send you a report for your records. This details the application rate, product type, nutrient amounts and trace element additions.

Where can I find more information?

Water UK is the representative body of the water industry in the UK. Their website can provide further information on biosolids and waste management www.water.org.uk

For more information on Thames Water and our operations please visit our website www.thameswater.co.uk

