The long-term success of biosolids land application programs depends on the ability of biosolids professionals to continually earn their “license” to operate. What does this mean? It means that every day their stakeholders – including the people in the communities where biosolids are produced and applied – make decisions about the acceptability of biosolids in their communities.

Effective communication is essential to earning and sustaining that license to operate. Furthermore, the costs of ineffective communication can be very high, potentially resulting in the irreplaceable loss of the land applier’s credibility; unnecessary, bitter, and prolonged public disputes on projects and costly delays; burdensome regulation; critical and unsupportive employees; and loss of commercial opportunities.

WERF and its subscribers recognize the need for biosolids professionals to more proactively and effectively communicate with community members and engage them in dialogue about the beneficial use of biosolids in their communities.

This research developed tested communications materials based on the in-depth research. The materials include a dialogue presentation for use at community meetings, brochure tailored for local community members, and draft templates for onsite signage.

Benefits
- Demonstrates the need for biosolids professionals to more proactively and effectively communicate with community members and engage them in dialogue about the beneficial use of biosolids in their communities.
- Provides biosolids professionals with valuable hands-on tools and guidance to help them better communicate with stakeholders.
- Uses two case studies to show how the tools and guidance were applied by biosolids professionals to support outreach and dialogue in their local communities.
- Provides supporting tools and sample materials that biosolids professionals can customize as they develop their own outreach and dialogue efforts.

Related Products
- Site-Specific Risk Assessment Tools for Land-Applied Biosolids (SRSK3R08)
- Public Perception of Biosolids Recycling: Developing Public Participation and Earning Trust (00PUM5)
- Pilot Testing: Surveillance and Investigation of the Illness Reported by Neighbors of Biosolids Land Application and Other Soil Amendments (08HHE5PP)

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with biosolids professionals. They are willing to support local land application, but they want their questions and concerns about odor, safety, and fairness to be adequately addressed. Critical to their support is their trust and confidence in the people who produce, use, and regulate biosolids to ensure the safety of themselves, their families, their neighbors, and their environment.

A Strategic Risk Communications Tool for Biosolids Professionals

A key outcome of this project is the science-based “Strategic Risk Communications Process for Outreach and Dialogue on Biosolids.” The Process, originally developed for Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, was modified to fit the unique (and often unmet) communications needs of biosolids professionals.

The process, described in the researchers’ report, was designed to be an integral part of effective risk assessment and management processes. It provides a set of integrated procedures and supporting tools which can be readily scaled to fit the needs of a specific biosolids program and its host communities. It can be used to address various challenges and opportunities such as: developing targeted communications addressing topics of interest to specific stakeholders; developing and adopting best practices in biosolids risk management and communication; and advancing innovative biosolids use projects.

Drawing on the key learnings from the research challenge, the research team developed an instructive Primer for Biosolids Professionals to enable biosolids professionals to design and conduct outreach and dialogue in communities where biosolids are applied. It offers step-by-step guidance on how to adapt and implement the Strategic Risk Communications Process for Outreach and Dialogue on Biosolids. It provides supporting tools and sample materials that biosolids professionals can customize for their own use.

Applying the Strategic Risk Communications Process

The Strategic Risk Communications Process for Outreach and Dialogue on Biosolids was adapted and validated through two case study collaborations with the City of Tulsa Public Works and the Virginia Biosolids Council. WERF investigators worked with each case study team to identify the opportunities for outreach and dialogue, and then conduct research to learn first-hand their community stakeholders’ interests, priorities, and communications needs regarding biosolids land application. Actionable plans and tested communications materials were developed based on the in-depth research findings and the needs of the specific biosolids programs. These materials included a dialogue presentation for use at community meetings, a brochure tailored to meet the needs of local community members, and draft templates for onsite signage.

The case study teams saw real value in taking proactive steps to improve their current outreach and dialogue efforts. The process enabled them to: gain insight into their stakeholders’ priorities and needs; understand at what level – who, what, and when – to communicate; and learn how they could improve their engagement.