



Four New State-Funded Research Studies Conclude that Land Application of Non-Industrial Biosolids Is Safer Than Landfilling

Maine's wastewater industry urges the state to reconsider current policy amid mounting environmental concern and new research studies

October 17, 2025, AUGUSTA, Maine – [Maine's Water Environment Association](#) (MeWEA), the state's largest association of clean and wastewater experts, is calling on Maine lawmakers to review four newly released studies, which all conclude that organic land application of non-industrial biosolids is an environmentally safer option than landfilling. Since 2022, when Maine became the first in the nation to ban land application due to PFAS concerns, 100-percent of Maine biosolids have been dumped into landfills or shipped out of state. Since the land application ban, Maine's Department of Environmental Protection has been assessing PFAS levels on farmlands statewide and has identified that only farms that received industrial biosolids, which were used as fertilizer, had high concentrations of PFAS. Farmlands that received non-industrial municipal biosolids had much lower, federally acceptable levels. In light of the new research, testing, and advanced risk management tools, MeWEA is encouraging state leaders to revisit the 2022 policy.

"There is not a wastewater leader in Maine that believes landfilling is a good option for the state's biosolids, but we don't have any other," said Phil Tucker, York Sewer District. "LD 1911 is an unfunded mandate and until Maine dedicates funding for technology to destroy PFAS or dry biosolids before they reach the landfill, we will not exit this crisis without reconsidering beneficial land application of non-industrial biosolids," Tucker said.

Mounting Landfill Pressure, Missed Climate Goals

The September 2025 closure of the Hawk Ridge compost landfill underscores a growing crisis. Hawk Ridge accepted biosolids from around New England and was recently closed due to unsafe levels of PFAS in neighboring soils and waters. Juniper Ridge, Maine's only state-run landfill will reach capacity by 2028. Maine DEP has recommended expansion, despite local opposition and an impending lawsuit. The strained facility suddenly closed in 2023 due to a short-term capacity crisis, leaving wastewater facilities dangerously close to overflowing raw sewage into Maine waters. In 2023 and again in 2025, Maine authorized the import of out-of-state waste to stabilize these facilities — a decision that further contradicts the state's climate commitments.

What the Science Says

Maine Bureau of General Services, Maine's Solid Waste Management Plan, and two reports commissioned by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection conclude: **With proper testing and oversight, non-industrial biosolids can be safely reused, and play a key role in reducing landfill volumes, carbon and methane emissions, and the use of chemical fertilizers.**

- The [2023 Brown and Caldwell Report](#), commissioned by Maine DEP, concluded that returning to regulated land application is the most environmentally and economically sound option.



- [Maine’s Bureau of General Services](#) (2025) warned of looming landfill capacity issues and emphasized the need to revisit organic reuse practices.
- Maine’s [Solid Waste Management Plan](#) (January 2024) highlighted biosolids as high-value organic material, noting that landfilling contradicts the state’s waste and greenhouse gas goals.
- [DEP’s own 2025 study](#) found that the most severe PFAS contamination stemmed from industrial sources — not municipal wastewater systems — and that most land application sites present no health or environmental risks when properly managed. DEP’s report shows that landfilling biosolids strains capacity and generates more methane emissions.

Models to Follow

Other states have taken a phased approach to PFAS management. Arizona paused biosolids application, studied the risks, and reinstated the practice under a managed system. Michigan [established screening levels](#) to isolate industrially impacted biosolids, which have significantly higher levels of PFAS, enabling beneficial reuse to resume.

“We know that biosolids have inherent benefits in terms of protecting the climate and supporting soil health. And we now know that our current approach of landfilling carries additional issues in terms of capacity and local rights. While we continue to phase PFAS out of the products we consume, the time has come to reconsider our one-size-fits-all ban on land application,” Dan Marks, Superintendent, Falmouth Wastewater.

“MEWEA commends the state for taking a deliberate pause to investigate sites, remediate concerns, and enact source control legislation. These were critical first steps,” said Terry Tucker, President, MeWEA. “We need to follow the new information surrounding PFAS as evidenced in these new reports, and develop a plan that balances environmental protection, economic needs, public health, and agriculture. MeWEA urges the State to revisit the past policy and revise based on new insights and information,” Tucker added.

###

About MAINE WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION

Representing 650 businesses, nonprofits and water and sewer districts within Maine’s water industry, the Maine Water Environment Association’s (MeWEA) mission is to support the future of clean water. Through training and education of future generations; advocacy for sustainable policies that protect the environment; and investing in innovative technologies and infrastructure that build resilient communities, MeWEA is advancing the water industry and provides the tools and support so that members can be stewards of clean water and public health. For more information visit: <https://www.mewea.org>

For Media Inquiries: Diana Nelson, diana@blackflymedia.com, 978-985-9993