

School and Other Small-Scale Food Composting: FAQs for Schools and Other Small-Scale Food Composters

How many compost bins can I have on-site before I should be concerned about getting a permit?

The total amount of materials for composting and finished compost on-site at any one time must not exceed 100 cubic yards and 750 square feet.

Is it OK if I let the nearby nursery, coffee shop, juice bar, etc., bring materials for our compost pile?

Yes, as long as the capacity limits mentioned above are met. Also, know that meats and dairy are not usually advised in small-scale compost piles.³ A recommendation is that you check your local policies to ensure requirements are not more stringent.

Someone just donated an Earth Tub to us. Local Master Composter volunteers from the community take care of it for us. How do we know if we should be concerned about permitting?

Again, as long as the capacity limits mentioned above are met, there is no rule about who must maintain the organic materials and compost.

Why is all this permitting talk such a big deal anyway?

Oversight of large composting operations ensure public health and safety when it comes to vectors, disease, odor, and fire, to name a few. Smaller operations, such as the ones we are talking about for your small-scale operation or school, are rarely a cause for these concerns.

What is an LEA?

A Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) has the main responsibility for ensuring the safe operation of solid waste and organics facilities. It is usually located in your local public

health department. Although it can be used as a resource, it is rare that an LEA would be involved with a small-scale operation or school compost pile.

- 1 See “Who Needs a Solid Waste Facility Permit” for more details about tiered permits, what facilities fall into the different tiers, and what the permit conditions require.
www.calrecycle.ca.gov/SWFacilities/Permitting/Facts.htm#Who. Also see California Public Resources Code §44000.5 and following. See also Title 14, §18100 California Code of Regulations.
- 2 See www.calrecycle.ca.gov/LEA to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of Local Enforcement Agencies.
- 3 Section 17855.2(a) of the Compostable Materials regulations (<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/laws/regulations/title14/ch31.htm>) prohibits the composting of unprocessed mammal tissue, except when received from restaurants, food processors, grocery stores, or residences. Though the regulations don’t explicitly prohibit meat, for the most part sources of meat going to small-scale school composters would be consistent with the exception sources, though many best-management practices advise against adding meat and dairy to small-scale compost piles.

<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/swfacilities/compostables/BMP/default.htm>

School and other small-scale operation food composting
New laws are in effect, but your school compost pile should be just fine.

Compost piles are regulated by size and by the materials put into them. The good news is that if yours is not larger than an average-sized back-yard pool,* you’re good to go.

California Small-Scale Composting Regulations

Small composting and anaerobic/in-vessel digestion activities may take place as an “Excluded Activity” with no permitting¹ or Local Enforcement Agency (LEA)² notification, if the following criteria are met:

- **Compost pile:** May contain agricultural, food, and vegetative materials (alone or in combination). The total amount of solid waste feedstock and residuals on-site at any one time must be less than 100 cubic yards (volume) and 750 square feet (area).
- **In-vessel digestion system (when the entire digestion process is conducted in a sealed container that is capable of containing liquids and airborne emissions):** The total amount of solid waste feedstock and residuals on-site at any one time is less than 100 cubic yards.