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# MailOnline

## Giant compost heaps could raise risk of skin and lung conditions

By [Tom Kelly](#)

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Giant compost heaps used to recycle garden waste and leftover food could be harming the health of those living nearby, experts have warned.

Researchers fear the industrial-scale sites increase rates of asthma, respiratory infections and skin complaints among locals unless they are correctly regulated.

There are already nearly a hundred commercial composting facilities in the UK, handling more than 1.7million tons of waste per year.



**Fears: Researchers believe that giant compost heaps could increase the risk of skin and lung conditions in locals**

The number is expected to double as councils scramble to meet Government targets for recycling organic household waste.

But critics warn that the sites lead to increased numbers of rats and flies which help to spread disease.

Compost also contains bacteria, spores and fungi that can become airborne in emissions known as bioaerosols, which are potentially harmful to humans.

A Government-backed study by the Environment Agency and Cranfield University has already found that among 44 sites examined, only eight had produced adequate risk assessments on protecting the surrounding area from bioaerosols.

Studies on workers at composting sites have also shown that there is a risk of respiratory infections from organisms that thrive in decaying organic matter and diseases such as farmer's lung, a common cause of breathing difficulties among farm workers.

Peter Sykes, head of the centre for public protection at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff, said: 'There is certainly an occupational risk to people working in compost sites, but the risk to residents living nearby is less well known.'

'It depends on how the waste is being turned, the weather and the landscape itself.'

A survey of 132 residents living near a composting facility in Coven, Wolverhampton, carried out for Ken Purchase, MP for Wolverhampton North East, found that 66 felt the health of someone in their family had been harmed by the facility.

Mr Purchase said: 'What is clear is that the nuisance is persistent and that the smell alone prevents residents enjoying the pleasure of their gardens and, in some cases, means doors and windows have to remain shut even on good summer days.'

It usually takes three months for organic waste to turn into usable compost, during which time temperatures inside the compost heaps can hit nearly 150F (65C).

In most sites waste is piled up in the open and regularly turned over by heavy machinery, which aids composition but spreads dust.

The Environment Agency is now producing new guidance for composting sites on how to reduce their emissions.

The UK produces more than 100million tons of food and other organic waste each year but currently just 2.8million tons are sent for composting.

Trelawney Dampney, managing director of Dorset-based Eco Sustainable Solutions and a director at the Association for Organics Recycling, said the industry was aware of the concerns and followed Environment Agency guidance to try to avoid any risk to the public.

He said: 'The Environment Agency advises that all sites should be more than 250 yards from residential dwellings because within 250 yards the exposure to bioaerosols could be reasonably high, especially if they are down wind.'

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Collecting of all this stuff causes huge amounts of CO2 to be burnt and is very costly' using tons of diesel in all the lorries and ships when collecting and shipping it all abroad to the far east' for recycling' but this is ignored all the new Lorries having to be produced using vast amounts of energy to make them. Then paying the drivers and road tax per lorry. But there are huge amounts of money to be made by the local councils and private companies selling the recycled waste or fertiliser and we are all being conned to sort it for them on fear of a fine if we refuse. NOTHING TO DO WITH SAVING THE PLANET it does save the Earth's resources YES but at a cost of creating more CO2 but that's about all and is never spoken of

BET THE PEOPLE REASONABLE FOR THIS POLICY DO NOT HAVE TO LIVE NEXT TO THE STINK AND FLIES. All looks good on paper but a different thing when we all dig a little deeper into the true cost regarding CO2 when collecting and recycling it.

- JDH, west/midlands, 29/6/2009 11:59

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Burn it to make electricity. That is the best way to get rid of all the rubbish. It's a win win win idea. It gets rid of the rubbish. It is cheap fuel thus saving oil for later use. It upsets environmentalist. How can we lose?

- Charles, San Francisco, CA USA, 29/6/2009 11:45

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Give everybody a wormery. I have one and it's great for kitchen waste, and shredded paper.

- Dave K, Leeds, UK, 29/6/2009 11:32

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Excellent - something else that could kill me. Shall we just shoot ourselves now and save the trouble of contracting compost cancer, or whatever it's going to be called??

- Margaret, Warwickshire, England, 29/6/2009 10:31

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Just wait..... next week the news will be good.

- Mike P, Leeds, England, 29/6/2009 09:05

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Just bury it.

This will trap carbon below ground - thereby acting as a carbon sink - taking carbon out of the cycle and reducing CO2 in the atmosphere. The stuff is of low toxicity so can be buried almost anywhere. But obviously this will not accord with EU directives

- Ricky G, Greater Manchester, 29/6/2009 08:30

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