Alaska Anew

Volume IV, Issue 3 Fall 2008

ALASKA'S SOLID WASTE NEWSLETTER

A message from Roland Shanks

From Roland Shanks, RCAC rural development specialist

In the near future, there will be changes in the *Alaska Anew* newsletter. The newsletter is funded by a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development grant that ended on Sept. 30. The USDA grant also supports my work in several Alaska communities and the Recycling Summit, which has been held in conjunction with the Alaska Forum on the Environment. I am sure funding is a problem you have all faced in your own work at one time or another.

In this issue...

Alaska Anew is dedicated to increasing awareness of and finding solutions to solid waste issues in Alaska. ***Alaska Anew*** is published by **Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)** through a grant from U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Rural Development.

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Let us work together to protect and conserve the beauty of Alaska.

In past years, we used other funding sources to support these activities. We are working to realign our funding so we can continue to provide these services and reviewing all we do to look for more economical ways to do it.

To that end, we are planning on switching to an electronic edition of *Alaska Anew.* We will still write and design *Alaska Anew* in newsletter style, but it will not be mailed. We will post an electronic version of the newsletter on RCAC's website, and develop an e-mail list of recipients. This will save in printing and mailing costs as well as save trees and ink. This change accomplishes what we are all about – reducing solid waste at the source. If you want to continue to receive the *Alaska Anew* newsletter, please send your name and e-mail address to us at *Alaska-Anew@rcac.org*.

(see "Roland's message" on page 3)

If it doesn't move ... compost it!

A critter composting guide

By Joe Mitschelen, RCAC rural development specialist

Have you ever considered composting road kill? What about composting those nuisance critter parts and butcher carcasses? After reading the article "Compost: It's not just for breakfast anymore," (see the last issue of *Alaska Anew*) many of you are familiar with wood, grass and vegetable compost. With just a little extra thought you can compost other items too. The process can be done quickly and odor free.

Reduce– Odors and pests

Reuse – Trees, shrubs and animal carcasses

Recycle – Nature

In many cases, compost provides an inexpensive alternative for disposal of dead animals. Composting animal carcasses is not new; chickens, pigs, deer, moose, calves, cows and even whales have been composted.

Why compost carcasses or process waste?

- Reduces rat, bear and bug attraction
- Saves landfill space and reduces water quality problems
- Can be done year-round, even when the ground is frozen
- Can be done using common equipment and readily available materials
- Relatively odor free
- Any size animal can be used
- Relatively low labor and management needed
- Low cost

When you compost vegetative matter you combine 3-part browns (wood and dry) and 1-part greens (vegetables and grass), layer them, keep them moist and turn them regularly. In the simplest terms composting critters is the same; just add 1-part animal.

Compost is an organic process and you need to have the right combination of carbon and nitrogen in the food. The critter will supply the nitrogen and the wood chips, compost or straw adds the balance. Compost also needs water and warmth to thrive. That is why compost piles are managed differently in the summer than in the winter. Water may be added in the summer when the compost might dry out and warm compost may be used to start a new pile in the winter. Once piles start, they are self heating. The bacteria that produces odor free compost needs air to thrive. Without oxygen other bacteria takes over the process and the smell of rotting meat is the result. Turning the piles provides the needed oxygen.

To compost large animals the recipe is like a big sandwich. So follow the recipe, but pay attention to what you do so you can learn what works best for you in your particular situation.

In general, to make the sandwich, take out your plate and put down a layer of material to absorb any leakage, a layer to allow air circulation, a layer of composting materials and the critter, and finally a layer of air circulation/odor control materials and your sandwich is complete. Now cook, turn and cook again and the compost is ready to cure.

What you need

- ☑ Composting materials (wood chips, straw, saw dust, finished compost)
- ☑ Starter compost material, un-screened compost or commercial compost
- ☑ Three- to four-foot long compost thermometer
- ☑ Water supply
- ☑ Loader or machine to turn compost
- ☑ Latex or vinyl gloves for handling material
- ☑ Log book for keeping notes on your process

Material types

Moisture absorbers – Sawdust is the most common material but straw, wood chips or older, finished compost may be used.

Air circulation materials – Wood chips, straw or coarse compost are used at the base of the pile to encourage air circulation, absorb excess moisture and serve as a marker for turning.

(continued on page 3)

Compost material – A mix of saw dust, grass and weeds, shrub and tree grinds, or raw compost are carbon-rich material used to compost the carcass.

Odor absorption materials – Wood chips or course compost are usually used to absorb potential odors, control moisture, prevent wind erosion and insulate the pile.

Note that some materials are used for many functions. Wood chips and grinds are the most common followed by coarse compost. Once you have done a batch of compost you may use it to make layers in the next batch.

If you use baled hay or straw, be sure it is "fluffed" beforehand because air does not easily pass through the compact slabs.

Many materials that you can use divert product from the waste stream. Look for opportunities like mill waste, and road and power line maintenance waste (such as grass and tree trimmings).

Pile construction

The plate

Select a site that is well drained and not subject to flooding. Depending on site topography, keep piles away from water courses, sinkholes, seasonal seeps or other landscape features that indicate the area is hydrologically sensitive.

Start with a hard surface made of asphalt, concrete, millings or hard dirt.

Plan on how much space you might need depending on the number of animals you are composting and the other materials available.

The sandwich

Lay a six-inch layer of moisture absorbers, followed by a layer of air circulation material 18 – 24 inches thick.

Place the animals on top of these layers in the center of the bed, back-to-back in a single layer. Back-to-back helps generate more heat in the reaction.

Cover the animals with six inches of damp high carbon material such as chips or compost. Then cover everything with 12 – 24 inches of odor absorption material or finished compost.

Take notes on everything you do. Keep your log book so you have a record of each batch or pile that you create.

(See "Composting critters" on page 4)

Roland's message . . . *continued from page 1*

The newsletter will continue to cover the same types of activities. We will discuss what communities are doing around the state and how some communities are recycling. We will continue to cover new ideas and technologies, such as the composting project Threshold Recycling is exploring in Kodiak. We also will continue to provide information about major environmental conferences held in the state, and funding sources and opportunities. The newsletter will cover Alaska Zero Waste Action Council activities and other zero waste activities in the state, such as the Zero Waste Resolutions passed by the Matanuska Susitna Borough and the Municipality of Anchorage. We also will continue discussions about national recycling issues and at times some of my thoughts about recycling growth.

Alaska Anew

To continue to receive this publication, please send an e-mail to: *Alaska-Anew@rcac.org*

During the last four to five years we have all worked together to increase recycling and to improve solid waste management in Alaska. We have played a role in conjunction with several other groups, tribes and small communities, and rest assured we will do all we can to continue to support these activities.

Alaska Tribal Conference

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium will hold the 14th Annual Alaska Tribal Conference on Environmental Management at the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel on Oct. 27 – 29.

Register on the web at *http://events.signup4.com/atcem* or print the form and fax it to 907/562-2016.

The sessions have been organized into six tracks: Solid Waste Management, Backhauling, Solid Waste Funding, Educational, Renewable Energy and Global Warming.

Two days of Indian General Assistance Program (IGAP) training will follow the conference (Oct. 30 – 31). For more information about the IGAP training call 907/271-3422.

Composting critters . . . *continued from page 3*

In warm weather make sure that you monitor your moisture so that the pile is always damp but not soggy.

The first pile turning should be in about 30 – 45 days. The pile temperature should rise to 130 degrees Fahrenheit for several days. When the temperature returns to below 110 degrees you can turn it. This is considered one cooking cycle.

Turn the pile from the top of the bottom layer up to avoid disturbing the floor of your pile. Cover the turned pile again with 12 inches of odor absorbing material.

In cold weather use compost from an existing pile that is still warm to put over the carcasses in order to get the pile started. Keep the pile larger to help insulate. Add compost to make any existing six-inch layer 12 inches thick.

Curing Pile

Once your pile has been through two cooking cycles – where the core temperature has exceeded 130 degrees for several days and then returned to below 110 – and one turn, it should be ready to put in a curing stockpile. This material also will be used in some layers of your next pile. At this point there should be no flesh visible, but possibly a little hair. Completed compost should be dark with a soil like texture and have no odor. After curing for 30 days the compost is ready to use. For some applications you may want to screen your compost to remove the larger pieces, which you can put in future piles and reduce even more.

There are many websites and sources of information on how to compost carcasses successfully, and you can always contact RCAC for assistance: Joe Mitschelen, 509/429-0809, *jmitschelen@rcac.org* or Roland Shanks, 907/230-4918, *rshanks@rcac.org*.

Composting websites to visit:

http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/composting.htm#mortalitycomposting

http://www.wdmc.org/2005/18Auvermann.pdf

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