



What is sewage sludge?

Sewage sludge, also known as biosolids, is a by-product of wastewater and sewage treatment.

Treated sewage sludge is commonly spread on agricultural land because it contains nutrients, but it also contains toxic contaminants not destroyed during treatment processes.

Sewage sludge is different to slurry, which is a mix of animal manure and water.

What is in sewage sludge?

Sewage sludge contains nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, but also toxic contaminants including pharmaceuticals, microplastics, PFAS, heavy metals, bisphenols, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), parabens, antibiotic-resistant bacteria and antibiotic-resistance genes.

Does it harm the environment?

Yes. Complex mixtures of contaminants remain after treating sewage sludge and are released into the environment, where they can accumulate and contaminate food chains.

There are significant risks from continuous sewage sludge application, including long-term soil degradation, water pollution and harm to biodiversity.

Can it affect my health?

Yes. Toxic contaminants, such as PFAS and microplastics, are associated with a variety of adverse health effects. Crop uptake of contaminants from sewage sludge could harm human health. People living near sewage sludge spreading report unbearable smells and respiratory issues.

What is the Scottish Government doing?

The *Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025* introduced new regulations for sewage sludge spreading but they do not go far enough.

What needs to change?

We need to adopt the precautionary principle and re-evaluate the risks of sewage sludge to environmental, animal and human health.

Scotland should:

- Stop all imports of sewage sludge to Scotland.
- Introduce a moratorium until the harmful contaminants are removed.
- Align with the EU to improve the monitoring and treatment of sewage.
- Make polluters pay for the treatment costs.
- Introduce contaminant control measures such as a full ban on PFAS chemicals.

Take action!

**We all have the right to NON-TOXIC ENVIRONMENTS
TO LIVE, WORK, STUDY AND PLAY**



Find out more
about our campaign
to Stop Toxic
Sewage Sludge.



Tell us about your
experience of sewage
sludge to help build
our evidence.

What can I do if I have a concern?

Contact us for free legal advice at www.ercs.scot/get-advice
[ercs.scot](https://www.ercs.scot)  [@ercscot](https://www.instagram.com/ercscot)  [environmental rights centre for scotland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/environmental-rights-centre-for-scotland)

All data is accurate at September 2026, for a full set of references contact admin@ercs.scot.

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