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COMPOST OPERATION RED-LIGHTED ONCE AGAIN.

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Byline: Karen Maeshiro Daily News Staff Writer

For the second time in a month, county supervisors Tuesday delayed granting final approval for a sewage composting operation near Antelope Acres because storm water flowed over the property in February.

State water officials have told Maryland-based BioGro that it cannot spread any sludge as fertilizer for its farming operation until it comes up with a plan by June 15 to protect against flooding and to control runoff, which occurred during El Nino-spawned rainstorms.

“This is to ensure BioGro submits to the state its flood mitigation plans,” said Dave Vannatta, an aide to Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich. “Behind that, it is our belief that BioGro is unable if not unwilling to comply with conditions of approval in general.”

Antonovich had sought to delay the decision until October to make sure BioGro submitted a plan and had flood control improvements in place, but he failed to get a second to his motion.

The board then approved on a 4-1 vote, with Supervisor Gloria Molina dissenting, to postpone the decision until June 23, Vannatta said.

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BioGro, a division of Maryland-based Wheelabrator Clean Water Systems Inc., is seeking to establish a composting operation on 67 acres on its farm south of Avenue A and west of 140th Street West.

[brown is a sign that leaf pickup soon will begin](#)

[Why the universe would think giving grades in school is stupid. if the universe thought of such things.\(Poem\)](#)

The company plans to pile sewage sludge and grass clippings or other plant waste in rows 7 feet tall, 18 feet wide and 850 feet long.

The county Regional Planning Commission had rejected BioGro's project, but BioGro appealed to county supervisors, who gave it a tentative go-ahead in June 1997.

BioGro officials said they were disappointed with the board's decision to delay the matter further.

"We know it's a good project," said company spokeswoman Linda Novick. "We're confident we will resolve the issues relating to flood control and runoff."

The supervisors earlier this month delayed voting on the project to hear testimony from representatives from the Lahonton Regional Water Quality Control Board about complaints that sludge used as farm fertilizer flowed off the property in February.

Water officials said BioGro violated its permit by not having adequate flood control measures in place, which resulted in runoff. Vannatta said BioGro did not notify regional water officials of the runoff, as required by the permit.

In an April 17 letter to BioGro, regional water officials ordered the company to stop applying sludge at the site until it comes up with a plan to deal with flooding and runoff.

BioGro can construct adequate flood control protection, formally change the permit to allow some flooding under certain acceptable conditions or stop land application of sludge at the site, water officials said.

Lyle Talbot, a member of Desert Citizens Against Pollution, testified at the meeting and challenged BioGro's ability to follow rules set forth in its permit.

"If they can't meet the conditions of their present permit, it would seem unwise to grant a new (conditional-use permit) inside the boundaries of that same piece of property," Talbot told the supervisors.

Of the two-month delay, Talbot said after the meeting, "It's better than them passing it."

Opponents want the project stopped outright or, failing that, to see the entire facility enclosed. Enclosing the site, they say, is the only way to keep the material from being blown off the site and to reduce the possibility of groundwater contamination.

BioGro officials rejected the idea of putting up barriers around the plant, saying it would cost \$78.6 million - a figure critics say is inflated. Critics put the price tag at closer to \$35 million.

Backers of the project say it will provide a low-cost way of recycling and would help Los Angeles County meet state-mandated goals of reducing the waste going into landfills.

Critics say the sludge contains industrial chemicals, including cancer-causing substances that can be carried great distances by the wind.

CAPTION(S):

Map

MAP: Proposed composting site

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