

In the late 1990's the City of Baltimore was facing a significant and pervasive challenge in terms of the numbers of children who were being exposed to potentially toxic-levels of lead dust. At that time, the doctors and researchers at the Kennedy Krieger Institute, who were treating a large percentage of these children, committed to undertake a research effort with the goal of reducing potentially harmful lead dust levels in residential yards by amending the soil and encouraging grass growth. The ensuing study found that this approach was successful in lowering soil lead levels and ultimately resulted in a new and effective standard that has helped to protect children and families since that time.

In response to recent inquiries, experts at Johns Hopkins University have reviewed the approved plans established for this pilot study. Following are some key points:

- The research protocols were initially reviewed and approved in 1999 by an institutional review board of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.
- Consent forms given to families who agreed to have the compost placed in their yards as part of the study also were reviewed and approved, and included the fact that the commercial compost was made from sewage sludge. The consent form specifically did include information about the make up of the compost called Eckology, also known as ORGRO.
- The residential areas studied were selected because they were known to have potentially risky levels of lead in the bare soil around homes. Records from the city, state, and the Institute's own lead clinic showed that these were the neighborhoods where the highest incidence of elevated blood lead levels were being reported.
- The purpose of the study was to see if the compost could help reduce lead dust in soil around homes and it ultimately proved effective in this regard. This study did not test children or families, nor was it designed to conduct assessments of any risk of using the compost.
- The investigators re-soiled the areas and planted grass using a commercially available and EPA-approved product that was, and is, widely regarded as an excellent soil amendment product.
- The compost was, and currently is, approved as safe for use by the EPA, the Maryland Department of the Environment, and other agencies.
- The use of this compost material was at the time both acceptable and even encouraged by prominent scientists in the field. As noted above, the study was not designed to determine long-term health risks of the compost or lead in the soil.
- The studies were conducted by faculty members of the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health working in conjunction with the Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Information regarding Eckology Compost:

The consent form contained the following statement: "Eckology compost is made from sterilized Baltimore sewage sludge mixed and composted with wood chips and saw dust. Eckology compost is licensed and approved by the Maryland Department of the Environment for distribution to the general public. Eckology compost is tested every month to ensure that it meets MDE

requirements for low levels of metals like lead. The composting process used to make Eckology kills germs.”

As science-based organizations, KKI and JHU understand that new questions frequently arise about old studies. If there is credible evidence that the compost in question poses a health problem, that certainly is worthy of study by experts in the field of bio solids. It's important to point out, however, that the compost used more than a decade ago in the KKI study is still approved by federal agencies for commercial and home use, and the broad weight of scientific information is that the compost is safe and reduces the bioavailability of lead in soil. Moreover, according to Dr. Rufus Chaney, studies on pigs and rodents have demonstrated the success of compost in reducing the bioavailability of ingested lead.

More information about Eckology compost can be provided upon request.