

Guidance on approvals, regulations and safety for organics units

This guidance is for small to medium food service organisations considering installing organics units. It builds on the [Victorian food organics recycling guide](#)¹ by providing additional information on:

- approvals and regulations
- health and safety precautions.

It is recommended that this document is read in conjunction with the *Victorian food organics recycling guide* and readers undertake their own research and analysis.

1 Approvals and regulations

The operation and management of organics units may be subject to regulations, including:

- EPA Victoria approval and licensing
- council planning approval and permits
- Trade Waste Agreements

Organics units require careful management to minimise odour and dust, avoid water pollution, and ensure that vermin and flies do not become an issue. MWRRG recommends that organisations first obtain all necessary approvals and then develop a site management plan. This plan should incorporate any operating conditions which will assist staff operating the equipment and minimise health and environmental impacts.

1.1 EPA Victoria approval and licensing

In Victoria, any facility with capacity to process more than 100 tonne of organics per month will require EPA Works Approval and Licensing. Smaller systems will require careful management to ensure that odour, vermin and flies do not become an issue.

Some industrial sites (e.g. food processors) may require planning and/or EPA Victoria environmental approvals for the use and development of the organics units, disposal of outputs for further treatment, or land applications (such as landscaping or agriculture).

For more information, visit the EPA Victoria website: <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/our-work/compliance-and-enforcement/acp-and-reports/acp-2014-15/strategic-compliance-projects/statewide-strategic-projects/organics>

1.2 Council planning approval and permits

Council land use planning controls and conditions on existing planning permits may mean that a planning permit (or amendment to the existing planning permit) and an endorsed plan is required prior to installing an organics unit.

¹ Produced by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services:
<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/victorian-food-organics-recycling-guide>

If a business or organisation wishes to treat organic waste produced by other organisations (in addition to its own) local government planning approval may also be required. There may also be other local government regulations applicable to the siting and operation of organics units to ensure units do not affect neighbouring properties through smell, operating and collection noise, odour or other means.

Each local government has different planning and local law regulations, so make sure you check with your council prior to the purchase and installation of organics units.

1.3 Trade Waste Agreements

If organics units discharge food into the sewer system a Trade Waste Agreement will be needed.

For example, on-site commercial food liquefier units grind food waste until soluble then discharge it into the sewer system. Some liquefier units also add biological agents to aid food break down. Other units may also produce a liquid output which may be disposed into the sewer system.

A Trade Waste Agreement specifies what can and cannot be discharged, and any treatment or monitoring required. Without proper management trade waste can affect the sewerage system and potentially impact on human health and the environment. For more information about Trade Waste Agreements, contact your local water authority.

2 Health and safety precautions

Organic outputs derived from organics units contain a variety of living organisms which, on rare occasions, have been associated with illness and allergies in some people. For health reasons, it is very important to take the following safety precautions when handling organic output materials:

- Wear gloves when handling materials and wash your hands afterwards.
- Avoid handling materials in confined spaces.
- If composting, keep compost moist to prevent fungal spores or bacteria from becoming airborne.
- Avoid direct contact with dry materials; gently wet it to allow for dust-free handling.

For people who have allergies to the fungal spores in compost products or depressed immune systems, it may be necessary to wear a face mask when handling materials.

Individuals with severe allergies may have to avoid contact with organic outputs altogether. Individuals with respiratory problems should be especially careful when working with organic materials.

A safety management system and appropriate Occupational Health and Safety training may be needed for tasks including:

- lifting bins
- handling organic waste
- managing the unit and its outputs
- dealing with possible contamination by non-organics or incorrect food waste items in the organics waste bin.

Ensure you consult with WorkSafe Victoria and the manufacturer of the unit for more information on health and safety.

3 Checklist before investing in a unit

There are many factors to consider when choosing an on-site food waste treatment system, including:

- types of feedstock and quantities
- outputs and their use
- costs
- staff involvement
- health and safety considerations
- environmental impacts and benefits
- approvals and regulations.

The following checklist may help you decide on the best option.

- Undertake a waste audit to establish volumes, types of organic materials and timing of inputs.
- Explore waste avoidance options, such as reviewing purchasing policies and reducing over-purchasing.
- Assess your site capabilities and any limitations regarding siting or storage.
- Explore the opportunities and capacity for managing potential outputs both on and off site, considering EPA Victoria and local laws.
- Speak to staff to build organisation support for organics processing.
- Do site visits to explore different technologies.
- Do a preliminary cost/benefit financial analysis to explore the viability and payback period for different options.
- Contact possible partner organisations for funding support, or for sharing the cost and siting of a unit.
- Prior to the purchase and installation of organics unit talk to your council and check existing planning permits and land use planning controls to determine if you need planning or building approvals.
- Understand what factors need to be addressed and managed to minimise risk.
- Develop a site management plan to manage your organics processing system.

The Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group can provide information to help you make an informed decision. Contact MWRRG on 8698 9800 or metro.waste@mwrrg.vic.gov.au