



MIDDLESEX COUNTY IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Charting the Life of a Middlesex County Leaf From Yard Waste to Compost, the MCIA Process

MIDDLESEX COUNTY – Only a few weeks from now, piles of rustic-colored leaves will blanket countless curbs across the County, marking autumn’s official arrival.

But few area residents, who contribute to those stockpiles with their own personal yard waste, are aware of the broad impact their small efforts make – both ecologically and financially.

Through the Middlesex County Improvement Authority’s (MCIA) Yard Waste Recycling Program, much of those curbside leaves are processed into compost, or decayed organic matter used to improve soil structure and nutrient levels. More importantly, they are also made available to the County’s 24 participating municipalities, free-of-charge.

Each year, between 15,000-and-20,000 tons of leaves make their way to municipal curbs – either through bags or in loose piles – and eventually to municipal or County regional yard waste sites, said MCIA Recycling Division Manager Ed Windas.

All leaves are composted and about 3,500-plus tons transported to the County’s Quarry Lane facility in North Brunswick.

Here, they are arranged into rows that span approximately 14 feet in width, 7 feet in height and between 200-and-300 feet in length.

“The way it’s processed, we have a windrow turner that straddles the row and turns it,” Windas said. “A windrow turner is a piece of heavy equipment that turns and fluffs the material by way of a rotating drum with fins.”

This monthly process only begins when employees, using a long-stem thermometer, determine that the material has reached its peak temperature of 140 degrees within the core.

“As the leaves within the rows decompose they generate heat,” Windas said. “If you stuck your hand into the core, it’s very warm and when they are turned during the winter, you can see steam rise from the piles.”

After about nine months and prior to distribution, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection requires Windas to test the material for heavy metals in compliance with the standards set forth in the facility’s operating permit.

In order to do this, Windas must provide a State certified laboratory with a representative sample from the approximately 2,000 cubic yards of processed compost.

Once the lab determines the material has reached maturity and is contaminant-free – an annual occurrence in Middlesex County since the State first required sample testing in 2003 – the compost is then made available and local officials are notified.

While some communities use the compost for municipal purposes, others offer it up to residents.

This compost is comparative to top soil, which in New Jersey retails for about \$20 a cubic yard, and similarly acts as an additive for the existing soils that are lacking in organic nutrients, Windas said.

On a few rare occasions, the MCIA’s excess compost has gone unclaimed and area landscapers are given the opportunity to purchase the remains. In that case, the money is then reinvested into the County’s recycling program to help sustain operational costs.

For more information on the MCIA’s recycling program, log onto www.mciauth.com.

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