

Trials prove septic sludge to compost plan a viable option

By Joan Clayton

A \$50,000 pilot program has found a way to turn Hills septic tank sludge and green waste into compost.

Now the Adelaide Hills and Mt Barker councils are hoping the trial can be developed into a commercial operation.

Program co-ordinator Kaye Arnold, the Adelaide Hills Council's environmental health manager, said the result was very positive.

"It shows waste from septic tanks can be mixed with green waste to make compost," she said.

"There were two concerns about the process, odours and pathogens.

"But the trial has shown there are no problems with either of these.

"There was a slight elevation in zinc level in the compost, but this is not a concern as most land in the Hills is zinc-deficient."

Mrs Arnold said the resulting compost would be ideal for landscaping, broad-acre properties and on degraded sites.

If the process can be developed into a commercial operation, she said the major benefit would be the saving in costs of disposing of septic waste.

SA Water fees for accepting effluent at the Heathfield treatment works have risen from \$1.50 a kilolitre in 2002 to the current figure of \$92.

About 3600 tonnes of septic solid waste is produced in the Hills each year and this is expected to reach about 7200 tonnes as the population increases.

As well, the region produces around 17,000 tonnes of green waste per year.

The trial has been carried out by Flinders University's bioremediation company at the Southern Waste depot near Tatchilla.

It was funded by a \$30,000 research and development grant from the SA Local Government Association and \$10,000 each from the Onkaparinga and Torrens catchment boards.

Bioremediation researcher Richard Stewart said it was an "environmentally friendly" process, turning two kinds of waste into a useful product that would also reduce costs for the councils.

He said the odour levels were very low and E. coli pathogens were "undetectable".



Adelaide Hills Council project officer Joshua Cufley gets a first-hand look at samples from the pilot program.