

**RADIATION
FOR A
CLEAN ENVIRONMENT**

1975

PROCEEDINGS SERIES

RADIATION
FOR A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON
THE USE OF HIGH-LEVEL RADIATION
IN WASTE TREATMENT - STATUS AND PROSPECTS
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FOREWORD

For some time the use of ionizing radiation has been envisaged as a means of solving some of the problems of treating municipal and industrial wastes. Some areas where radiation has been considered to offer some promise are: the reduction of organic pollutants; the disinfection of water supplies and waste-water; the disinfection of sludges and the modification of their physical properties, e.g. their sedimentation rate. However, economic considerations militated against any overwhelming enthusiasm for early major applications on these lines.

Recently, however, there has been a significant change in the world energy situation. The cost of oil has increased and the projected role of nuclear power has expanded, in turn affecting the analysis of the economic feasibility of the ionizing radiation treatment of wastes. In addition, consideration for the quality of the environment not only calls for the re-evaluation of conventional waste treatment technologies in the light of their own impact upon the environment, but also for the development of more effective means of waste treatment where conventional methods might be unsatisfactory. With these factors in mind it seemed necessary and timely to review the status of research and development in this subject, and to consider the environmental implications of the proposed technology.

Accordingly, a symposium was convened in Munich by the International Atomic Energy Agency, in co-operation with the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Bayerische Landesanstalt für Bodenkultur und Pflanzenbau, from 17 to 21 March 1975. The symposium, on the Use of High Level Radiation in Waste Treatment — Status and Prospects, was attended by 160 participants from 26 Member States and by representatives of two international organizations. Forty-eight papers were presented in eight sessions covering the current technology of waste-water treatment and re-use, radiosensitivity of micro-organisms, disinfection and microbiological control, physical and chemical modification of aqueous pollutants, technological and economic aspects, pilot plant design and operating experience, and radiation treatment of non-liquid wastes. In the final panel session a summary of the previous sessions was presented, followed by discussions on future prospects and lines of development, with emphasis on sewage water and sludge processing, its feasibility, and the research and development needed to promote it.

The full texts of all the papers and discussions, and an edited summary of the panel discussion are published in this volume. It is hoped that the Proceedings will be used as a primary reference work on the subject.

The Agency gratefully acknowledges the assistance and co-operation of the authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany for acting as host and providing the excellent facilities that helped greatly towards the success of the meeting.

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CONTENTS

REVIEW SERIES 1. CURRENT TECHNOLOGY OF WASTE-WATER TREATMENT AND RE-USE (Session 1)

Review paper:

Types and treatment of sewage sludges: Practice in the Federal Republic of Germany (IAEA-SM-194/101)	3
<i>M.O. Tabasaran</i>	
Discussion	18

Review paper:

Methods for reducing the infection hazard of waste-water sludge (IAEA-SM-194/102)	19
<i>J.B. Farrell, G. Stern</i>	
Discussion	27

Review paper:

Current technology and advances in true re-use of effluents (IAEA-SM-194/103)	29
<i>G.G. Cillié</i>	
Discussion	43

Review paper:

Public health aspects of waste-water treatment (IAEA-SM-194/104)	45
<i>Ebba Lund</i>	
Discussion	59

Review paper:

Radiation treatment of wastes: A review (IAEA-SM-194/405)	61
<i>F.S. Feates, D. George</i>	
Discussion	71
The need for the use of high-level radiation in water treatment and in waste-water (sewage) treatment (IAEA-SM-194/602)	73
<i>N.E. Nielson</i>	

REVIEW SERIES 2. RADIOSENSITIVITY OF MICRO-ORGANISMS (Session 2)

Surveys on radiation-resistant asporogenic bacteria in natural environments (IAEA-SM-194/202)	85
<i>K. Yano, B. Cho, T. Yoshinaka, H. Yamaguchi</i>	
Discussion	98

Review paper:

Viruses and ionizing radiation in respect to waste-water treatment (IAEA-SM-194/203)	99
<i>H.S. Lemke, A.J. Sinskey</i>	
Discussion	119

DISINFECTION AND MICROBIOLOGICAL CONTROL (Session 3)

Disinfection of sludge and waste-water by irradiation with electrons of low accelerating voltage (IAEA-SM-194/301)	123
<i>P. Holl, H. Schneider</i>	
Discussion	136
Biological effects of high-energy electron irradiation of municipal sludge (IAEA-SM-194/302)	139
<i>A.J. Sinskey, D. Shah, K.A. Wright, E.W. Merrill, S. Sommer, J.G. Trump</i>	
Discussion	148
Treatment of sewage sludge with combinations of heat and ionizing radiation (thermoradiation) (IAEA-SM-194/303)	151
<i>H.D. Sivinski</i>	
Discussion	166
Synergistic effects of irradiation of waste-water (IAEA-SM-194/304)	169
<i>D.D. Woodbridge, P.C. Cooper, A.J. Van den Berg, H.D. Musselman, H.N. Lowe</i>	
Discussion	189
Gamma irradiation for sewage treatment at US army facilities (IAEA-SM-194/305)	191
<i>A.J. Van den Berg, H.D. Hollis, H.D. Musselman, H.N. Lowe, D.D. Woodbridge</i>	
Discussion	196
Scope for utilizing gamma radiation for microbiological control of sewage waste-water in India (IAEA-SM-194/307)	197
<i>N.F. Lewis</i>	
Discussion	202
Sanitary effect of gamma irradiation on sewage sludge (IAEA-SM-194/308)	203
<i>E. Hess, C. Breer</i>	
Discussion	208
Data on the disinfection of liquid manure by gamma irradiation at Baja, Hungary (IAEA-SM-194/306)	209
<i>J. Simon, G. Tamási</i>	
Discussion	216

PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL MODIFICATION OF AQUEOUS POLLUTANTS (Session 4)

Review paper:	
Aqueous radiation chemistry in relation to waste treatment: An introductory review (IAEA-SM-194/401)	219
<i>J. Hoigné</i>	
Discussion	231
Radiation chemical destruction of phenol in oxygenated aqueous solutions (IAEA-SM-194/402)	233
<i>O.I. Mičić, M.T. Nenadović, V.M. Marković</i>	
Discussion	239
Effects of gamma radiation from ⁶⁰ Co on dilute aqueous solutions of Linear Alkyl Sulfonate Surfactants and other organic pollutants (IAEA-SM-194/404)	241
<i>D.M. Rohrer</i>	
Discussion	248
Effects of gamma irradiation on the degradation of dyes (IAEA-SM-194/407)	249
<i>N. Piccinini, F. Ferrero</i>	
Discussion	264

Possible use of high-level radiation for the degradation of some substances present in urban and industrial waters (IAEA-SM-194/408)	265
<i>C. Cappadona, P. Guarino, E. Calderaro, S. Petruso, S. Ardica</i>	
Discussion	284
Degradation of persistent organochlorine pollutants by gamma radiation and its possible use for waste-water treatment (IAEA-SM-194/409).	285
<i>L. Vollner, H. Rohleder, F. Korte</i>	
Discussion	296
Comparison of the chemical effects of ozone and of irradiation on organic impurities in water (IAEA-SM-194/410)	297
<i>J. Hoigné</i>	
Discussion	305

TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS (Session 5)

Alternative high-level radiation sources for sewage and waste-water treatment (IAEA-SM-194/501)	309
<i>D.S. Ballantine</i>	
Discussion	323
Use of high-power electron beam radiation for the treatment of municipal and industrial wastes (IAEA-SM-194/502)	325
<i>M.R. Cleland, J.P. Farrell, R.L. Malnati, K.H. Morganstern</i>	
Discussion	341
Prospects for high-energy electron irradiation of waste-water liquid residuals (IAEA-SM-194/503)	343
<i>J.G. Trump, K.A. Wright, E.W. Merrill, A.J. Sinskey, D. Shah, S. Sommer</i>	
Discussion	354
An electron accelerator with electrons of low-accelerating voltage for irradiating sewage sludge and waste-water (IAEA-SM-194/506)	355
<i>P. Holl, H. Schneider</i>	
Practical aspects of the pasteurization of sewage sludge by electron irradiation (IAEA-SM-194/509)	359
<i>M. Tauber, E.-G. Hofmann, B.P. Offermann</i>	
Discussion	366
Fission product gamma-ray sources as an alternative to cobalt-60 sources for sewage sludge sterilization (IAEA-SM-194/505)	367
<i>V.R.D. Herrnberger</i>	
Discussion	387
Costs and hygienic necessity of sewage sludge pasteurization in Switzerland (IAEA-SM-194/507)	391
<i>W. Obrist</i>	
Discussion	396
Considerations in the public acceptance of sewage sludge irradiation systems (IAEA-SM-194/508)	399
<i>G.P. Dix</i>	
Discussion	407

PILOT PLANT DESIGN AND OPERATING EXPERIENCES (Session 6)

The waste-water and sludge re-use project by gamma irradiation at Kecskemét, Hungary: Some approaches and investigations (IAEA-SM-194/603)	411
<i>J. Simon, F. Gács, A. Urbán</i>	
Discussion	417

Исследование радиационных процессов очистки сточных вод и разработка опытно-промышленных установок (IAEA-SM-194/611)	419
Н.Г. Коньков, С.П. Буслаева, В.Б. Осипов, Ю.А. Панин, Л.Д. Солодихина, Л.Б. Упадышев, В.Ф. Карпунин, З.Л. Файнгольд	
Discussion	431
Pilot plant experience in the treatment of industrial and municipal waste-water by means of radiation-induced oxidation (IAEA-SM-194/601)	433
W.C. Hay	
Discussion	444
Experience with a pilot plant for the irradiation of sewage sludge: Design, operation experience and cost calculations after 18 months of continuous running (IAEA-SM-194/604)	447
T. Lessel, H. Möttsch, E. Hennig, A. Suess, A. Rosopulo, G. Schurmann	
Discussion	464
Dosimetry at a high-activity ⁶⁰ Co waste treatment facility (IAEA-SM-194/605)	465
D.F. Regulla, G. Schurmann, A. Suess	
Discussion	476
Experience with a pilot plant for the irradiation of sewage sludge: Bacteriological and parasitological studies after irradiation (IAEA-SM-194/606)	477
I. Witzigmann, F. Würsching	
Discussion	484
Experience with a pilot plant for the irradiation of sewage sludge: Experiments on the inactivation of viruses in sewage sludge after radiation treatment (IAEA-SM-194/607)	485
C. Epp	
Effects of gamma radiation at pilot plant level compared with the effects of pasteurization on the dewatering of sewage sludges (IAEA-SM-195/608)	491
A.F. Groneman	
Discussion	501
Experience with a pilot plant for the irradiation of sewage sludge: Results on the effect of differently treated sewage sludge on plants and soil (IAEA-SM-195/609)	503
A. Suess, A. Rosopulo, H. Borchert, Th. Beck, J. Bauchhenss, G. Schurmann	
Discussion	533
Experience with a pilot plant for the irradiation of sewage sludge: Analytical studies on sewage sludge and plant material (IAEA-SM-194/610)	535
A. Rosopulo, I. Fiedler, H. Staerk, A. Suess	

RADIATION TREATMENT OF NON-LIQUID WASTES (Session 7)

Review paper:	
Recent advances in the treatment of solid wastes (IAEA-SM-194/702)	555
G. Shelef, M. Lapidot	
Discussion	577
Use of sewage sludge as fodder (IAEA-SM-194/701)	579
W. Schönborn	
Discussion	587
Potential of radiation sterilization in solid waste treatment:	
A status report (IAEA-SM-194/703)	589
R. Padova, M. Lapidot, M. Molco, I. Ross	
Discussion	599

Radiation recycling process of waste poly(tetrafluorethylene) scrap (IAEA-SM-194/704)	601
<i>V.T. Kagiya, M. Hagiwara</i>	
Discussion	612
Radiation fixation of vinyl chloride in an insecticide aerosol container (IAEA-SM-194/705)	613
<i>V.T. Kagiya, K. Takemoto</i>	
Discussion	619
Treatment of exhaust gases by irradiation (IAEA-SM-194/707)	621
<i>K. Kawamura, S. Aoki, W. Kawakami, S. Hashimoto, S. Machi</i>	
Discussion	631
Kinetic study on the irradiation of exhaust gases (IAEA-SM-194/706)	633
<i>M. Washino, O. Tokunaga, S. Hashimoto, W. Kawakami, S. Machi, K. Kawamura, S. Aoki</i>	
Discussion	642
Panel on the radiation treatment of wastes (Session 8)	645
List of Chairmen of Sessions and Secretariat of the Symposium	657
List of participants	659
Author index	671

REVIEW SERIES 1

CURRENT TECHNOLOGY OF
WASTE-WATER TREATMENT AND RE-USE

(Session 1)

Review paper

TYPES AND TREATMENT OF SEWAGE SLUDGES Practice in the Federal Republic of Germany

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Abstract

TYPES AND TREATMENT OF SEWAGE SLUDGES: PRACTICE IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY.

The sludge that is formed by the various processes in the sewage treatment plant consists mainly of water with a small amount of organic and inorganic suspended solids. It contains pathogenic agents and biological inhibitors, and must be prepared and brought into a form where it is less dangerous to the environment. The de-watering of the sludge is the first step in sludge handling. The solids content of the raw sludge, which is usually between 5 and 10%, can be increased by gravity thickening to 15%, by centrifuging or straining-band-pressing up to 30%, and by pressure-filtration up to 40%. The process of drying enables a substance with almost no moisture to be obtained. Generally the sludge will be either mixed before de-watering with coagulation agencies, or preheated, or its colloidal components biochemically oxidized in order to accelerate the withdrawal of the water. One of the most common methods of disposal is the transport of sludge to a land filling, usually together with the solid refuse of the community. For this purpose the moisture content of the sludge should not be more than 60 to 70%. The disposal of sludge into the sea can be practised in coastal towns, but the ecological effects of this kind of sludge removal are still disputed. More expedient is the agricultural utilization of sludge, particularly if the sludge is composted together with a carbon carrier such as city refuse which would make it a very suitable soil improver. In the Federal Republic of Germany the wet oxidation of sludge is applied in a few cases. The most common process is anaerobic alkaline digestion. The incineration of sludge is more economical than drying, but still too expensive in comparison with other approved processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a result of sewage treatment part of the solids will be retained in the form of sludge. The quantity and specific characteristics of the sludge are influenced by the type of sewage, the treatment applied and the efficiency of such treatment.

The sewage sludge consists of a relatively large amount of water and some solids. The solids are of an organic and inorganic nature.

Depending on its origin, sludge can be classified as domestic and industrial sludge.

1.1. Domestic sludge

Average quantities of domestic sludge are shown in Table I according to the treatment applied. Table I shows that the specific quantity of sludge fluctuates between 0.7 and 3.0 litres/capita daily, the water content between 90 and 97% by weight and the amount of organic solids in the total solids varies between 45 and 80%.

TABLE I. QUANTITIES OF DOMESTIC SLUDGE

Type of sludge	Sludge quantity (litres/capita daily)	Water content (Weight%)	Solids content (Weight%)	Organic solids (Weight%)	Inorganic solids (Weight%)
Raw sludge from primary sedimentation tanks	0.7 - 1.0	92-95	8-5	80-60	20-40
Low-rate trickling filter plant	0.7 - 0.9	90-92	10-8		
High-rate trickling filter plant	1.0 - 1.6	93-95	7-5		
Activated sludge plant	2.1 - 3.0	96-97	4-3	75-62	25-38
Digested sludge	0.5 - 0.8	90-93	10-7	60-45	40-55

TABLE II. PARAMETERS
FOR THE DETERMINATION OF
SLUDGE CHARACTERISTICS

1. Solids or water content
2. Incineration-residue or incineration loss
3. Organic carbon content
4. Specific gravity
5. Settling properties
6. De-waterability
7. Specific filter resistance
8. Compressibility
9. Grain composition
10. Hydrogen ion concentration
11. Acid consumption
12. Caloric value
13. Viscosity

The sewage sludge looks slimy and unsavoury. It contains an objectionable amount of pathogenic agents causing enteritis, hepatitis, anthrax, paratyphoid fever, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, typhoid fever and worm diseases of all types.

1.2. Industrial sludge

Quantity and composition of industrial sludge varies in wide ranges depending on the type and nature of industrial production. Type and quantity of the by-products produced and a possible recirculation of industrial water will influence the volume and the condition of the sludge.

Numerous industrial waste-waters contain biological inhibitors. In the metal-working industry poisonous heavy metal ions like lead, cadmium, iron, copper, nickel, mercury, zinc and tin, and also cyanides, chromates, free acids and lyes occur. There are also chlorides, nitrites and sulphates, and sometimes even oil emulsions, lubricants and solvents.

Part of these substances is decomposed or converted in the sewage treatment plant. The rest appears in the sludge. The toxic effect which these substances have on biochemical processes can add or multiply.

1.3. Sludge characteristics

To be able to determine the probable behaviour of a certain sludge during treatment or to compare several different sludges with each other, attempts are made to identify the sludge characteristics by defined parameters. Some of the most important of these parameters are listed in Table II.

2. DE-WATERING OF SLUDGE

As a rule, de-watering constitutes the first step of sludge handling. The lower its water content, the easier its further treatment. By reducing the water content the sludge volume is reduced (see Fig.1). Sludge with a solids content of 5% has a weight of 20 kg subject to a solids weight of 1 kg. After de-watering, say to 40% solids, the same sludge will weigh only 2.5 kg. Thus an increase in solids content from 5 to 40% results in reduction of sludge weight or sludge volume by seven eighths.

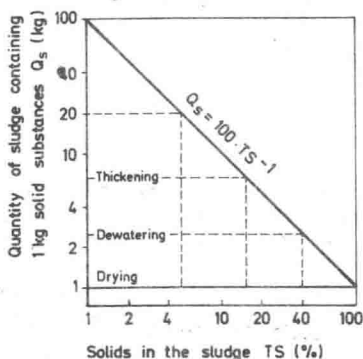


FIG.1. Sludge quantity depending on the solids content.

Adherence forces of different amplitudes prevail between the water and the solids in the sludge. The energy required for de-watering stands in a direct relation to the solids concentration desired. The following technical terms apply to the de-watering:

	Increase of solids from (% by weight)	content to (% by weight)	Sludge condition
(a) Thickening	5	15	Fluid and pumpable
(b) De-watering	15	50	Puncture-proof to crumbling
(c) Drying	50	100	Scatterable to dust-like

2.1. Improvement of the de-watering properties of sludge

The following methods have been found to increase the speed and extent of sludge de-watering.

- (a) Sludge blending
- (b) Sludge washing
- (c) Coagulation of sludge with metal salts, polymers, sludge ashes or thermal energy
- (d) Biological treatment.

2.1.1. Sludge blending

The finer sludge is mixed with the coarser sludge so as to change the grain structure and to increase the solids concentration. The finest suspended substances are adsorbed by the larger flakes and the possibility of sludge thickening is enhanced.

When blending a sludge with a solids content of $f = 5\%$ with a surplus sludge of $f = 2.5\%$ solids content, a blend is produced having a solids content of $f = 7\%$.

2.1.2. Sludge washing

The washing of sludge removes finer solids, thereby improving the grain structure. In addition, the nitrogen compounds are washed out as well with the consequence that less filtering agents are required for coagulation.

2.1.3. Sludge coagulation

Grain size and grain distribution can also be changed by coagulation where smaller particles unite to form larger flakes. Coagulation by electric current, intensified agitation or vibration, etc., is practised in rare cases only. Usually, electrolytes or characteristic or heterogenous ashes are added for this purpose.

2.1.3.1. Coagulation by metal salts. The electrolytes are capable of making up for and balancing the electrostatic charge of the colloids. In practice, predominantly metal salts such as iron sulphates, aluminium sulphates or aluminium chlorides are used.

The conventional electrolytes have recently been supplemented by a number of polymers which have found increased use for the de-watering of sludge.

2.1.3.2. Coagulation by polymers. Polymers are synthetic flocculation agents. They embody linear water-soluble molecules having molecular weights up to approx. 12 million. A chemical reaction (polymerization) produces very long-chain molecules.

The most important effects that polymers have on sludge de-watering are the following:

- (a) The de-watering speed is considerably increased. Therefore, the efficiency of de-watering aggregates can be increased considerably. There is, however, no increase in the potential solids content.
- (b) The most effective coagulation below optimal polymer batching can be reached only if the polymer is mixed with the sludge for a certain period. By contrast, when using an optimal amount of polymer, the mixing time is almost of no importance at all. In practice, the optimal quantity of polymers is never added and therefore the most favourable mixing times are mandatory.
- (c) The amount of polymer exercises a great influence on the filtration speed, the specific filter resistance and the compressibility. The best flake formation and fastest de-watering are obtained subject to a certain fixed ratio of polymer to sludge solids, the relation of which changes with the type of sludge available. The flakes thereby produced are, however, easily compressible which in turn leads to a relatively high compressibility coefficient. In cases such as this the application of very high pressures would no longer be valuable.
- (d) The filtrate pollution is rather high and increases in relation to the polymer batching. Therefore particular attention should be paid to the additional load imposed upon the treatment plant.

2.1.3.3. Coagulation by ashes. As a rule, during de-watering the compressibility of the solids content of the sludge impairs complete utilization of higher pressures to separate the liquid from the solid phase. By the admixture of mineral solids, e.g. sludge ashes, it is possible to improve the stability and increase the volume of the sludge cavities.

The specific filter resistance and the compressibility of the sludge are reduced as the amount of ash added is increased. The de-waterability of the sludge-ash blend is, however, not always improved indefinitely. It should be kept in mind that a certain definite mixing ratio yields most favourable results. This is due to the fact that the ashes will absorb part of the water and that the water absorbed by the ash will be very difficult to remove. The de-waterability subject to increased ash batching will be improved up to the point where the effect of water absorption of the ash balances the effect of the lower specific filter resistance. If pressure is applied, the filtration speed at increasing ash quantities will increase even though the total amount of water drained becomes less. As the ash content of the sludge to be de-watered increases, the solids content at the end of the de-watering process naturally increases as well. The residual water quantities therefore increase in the same way as the quantities of sludge cake increase. This means that an increased addition of characteristic ash to the sludge in the incinerator