## Montreal sludge incineration

#### Recovery of ash as phosphate fertilizer, liming product, and for the reduction of GHG emissions

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> MARC HEBERT, Expert & Trainer info@MarcHebert.ca



Recyclage agricole des cendres de boues d'épuration municipales de Montréal

État des lieux et optimisation des pratiques



Par

Marc Hébert, M. Sc., agr. Expert-conseil et formateur http://marchebert.ca/



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#### MARC HÉBERT, EXPERT-CONSEIL ET FORMATEUR

#### **Executive Summary**

This document was produced at the request of the Jean-R. Marcotte wastewater treatment plant of Montreal (the WiNTP). The main objective is to provide agronomists, managers, and various stakeholders with information on sewage sludge ash and its optimal use in agriculture, according to best agronomic practices, the scientific literature, and government and municipal objectives for recycling and addressing climate change, as well as economic constraints.

Below are key elements that emerge from this study, which are of particular interest to decision-makers, whether they are from the WWTP or from recycling firms:

About 15% of municipal sewage sludge is incinerated in North America, and the ash produced is generally disposed of in landfills.







#### M.Hebert. 2021. Montreal sludge incineration – recovery of ash as phosphate fertilizer, liming product and for the reduction of GHG emissions.

The Jean-R. Marcotte wastewater treatment plant in Montreal (Montreal WWTP) is one of the largest in North America. It generates around 250,000 wet metric tonnes of dewatered sludge annually. The process requires the use of iron and aluminum coagulants and makes it possible to remove more than 70% of the phosphorus (P) contained in wastewaters. The phosphorus thus captured is concentrated in the primary sludge, then in some 50,000 t of incineration ash, which are mainly eliminated by landfilling. In order to comply with the recovery objectives of the Québec ministry of the environment (MELCC, 2011), and the recommendations of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment on biosolids (CCME, 2012), Montreal has initiated various actions to recycle bottom ash as a source of phosphate fertilizer and lime.

One of the main steps was to evaluate their fertilizing properties. This work was carried out at Laval University by the team of Professor Lotfi Khiari, in collaboration with the MELCC, NEBRA and several other organizations and municipalities in Canada and New-England. The results confirmed that the sludge ash from a dozen WWTP, including those in Montreal, did indeed have phosphate fertilizer properties. The work also confirmed the liming value of the ash and its compliance with quality criteria for spreading.

These demonstrations enabled the MELCC to include this type of recycling in the December 2015 edition of its guidelines. In 2016, Montreal WWTP obtained a first registration of the *Fertili Cendres*<sup>™</sup> as a phosphate fertilizer with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). This registration allows the product to be sold in Canada. The quantities of *Fertili Cendres* shipped to farms in Quebec and eastern Ontario have gradually increased to approximately 10,000 t in 2020.

In the coming years, Montreal WWTP plans to refine its management and quality control approach in order to distinguish three types of products: 1. *Fertili Cendres*, containing a guaranteed minimum value of 1.4% available phosphorus for plants (expressed as  $P_2O_5$ -eq on a wet basis); 2. *Fertili Cendres PLUS*, containing a guaranteed minimum value of 3.0% of available P; 3. *Liming ash*, with a strong capacity to neutralize soil acidity to replace commercial limestone.

Montreal WWTP ash recycling rate is expected to eventually exceed the minimum target of 25% of the CCME (2012), which would be a first in Canada, and possibly even in North America. Other work is also planned, notably to diversify markets and to quantify gains in terms of reducing GHG emissions. Indeed, *Fertili Cendres* makes it possible to replace commercial phosphate fertilizers and imported from Asia and Florida. *Liming ash*, for its part, could replace limestone (CaCO<sub>3</sub>), which produces CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of fossil origin following land application. Liming ash, rich in Ca(OH)<sub>2</sub>, could even possibly be used for the chemical sequestration of CO<sub>2</sub> or sulfur gases of industrial origin.

In the longer term, the city of Montreal plans to replace the current incinerator with a new generation incinerator or a biogas plant.

# Sludge/biosolids management in Québec (2015)



## Montreal – an Island (pop. 2 000 000)



## CANADA – 2012 CCME policy for combustion



#### P value - 2014-15 Trials



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#### Influence of Sludge Incineration Ash on Ryegrass Growth and Soil Phosphorus Status

Claude-Alla JOSEPH<sup>1</sup>, Lotfi KHIARI<sup>1,\*</sup>, Jacques GALLICHAND<sup>1</sup>, Marc HÉBERT<sup>2</sup> and Ned BEECHER<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Soil Science and Agrifood Engineering, Laval University, Quebec G1V0A6 (Canada)
<sup>2</sup>Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and the Fight Against Climate Change (MDDELCC), Quebec G1R 5V7 (Canada)
<sup>3</sup>North East Biosolids & Residuals Association (NEBRA), Tamworth NH 05886-0422 (USA)

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P fertilizer value = f (rate, available P)



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#### Further developments- 2015-2016



#### 2017 : Commercial scale







#### **BIOSOLIDES MUNICIPAUX - CENDRES**

AMENDEMENT INORGANIQUE FERTILISANT PROVENANT DE STATIONS D'ÉPURATION DES EAUX MUNICIPALES MUNIES DE TECHNOLOGIE DE TRAITEMENT THERMIQUE



## 2019 Data mining Available-P variations !





## pH : a quick on-site indicator !



M

# Solution : manage 3 products vs pH!

- **1-Fertili Cendres (0-1.4-0)** •pH [10.4-11.3]
- **2-Fertili Cendres PLUS (0-3-0)** •pH ≤ 10.3
- 3-Liming ash
  - •pH > 11.3

•4R's

- Neutralizing value
  - •34 % C.C.E. (d.w.b.)







Next steps ...

Recycling rate
25% → 70% +
P importations
Limestone use
CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

- Implement recommendations
- Next RfP



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