

The Patriot Ledger- State auditor points to waste-full shipyard. Auditor asks MWRA to give surplus at shipyard to cities and towns
By, Nancy Reardon - 06/04/2008

Call it a waste of waste.

The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority hasn't been taking advantage of a contract that entitled it to hundreds of tons of fertilizer pellets a year from a Quincy plant that converts sewage sludge into fertilizer, the state auditor's office said today.

Under its \$146 million, 15-year contract with New England Fertilizer Co. that began in 2001, the MWRA sends sewage sludge to the plant at the Fore River Shipyard for processing. One provision in the contract calls for the MWRA to receive 900 tons of pellets, which it can sell commercially or donate to local governments or state agencies.

But the MWRA's efforts to pick up the pellets have declined, said Glenn Briere, a spokesman for State Auditor Joe DeNucci.

"I don't think they were even bothering with this," Briere said.

Briere said the MWRA has now told auditors, however, that it will notify communities that the fertilizer is available for free, if they want to pick it up from the plant.

"If you have a city and town that wants to grow grass on their playgrounds or their parks, it's theirs for the taking," he said.

MWRA spokeswoman Ria Convery said the MWRA initially had been picking up the sludge and delivering it to communities that were interested in it, but a budget crunch in 2003 had made that too expensive.

"A few people still come, but it's not the same as it was. ... We take the findings seriously and we're going to do a renewed effort" to reach out to communities to let them know the fertilizer is available, she said. QUINCY —

The state auditor's office doesn't want the Fore River shipyard to get too waste-full.

That's why it's reminding the MWRA about fertilizer produced at the shipyard that is supposed to be available to the 61 cities and towns in the sewer and water system. The free fertilizer is sitting at the plant. Municipalities can take it— as long as they pick it up themselves, said spokeswoman Ria Convery.

"Back several years ago when we started this, we were able to deliver it to communities that were interested. But of course we now have the same budget constraints as those communities," Convery said. "It was probably more enticing when we brought it to the door."

The Quincy plant converts solid waste from the Deer Island Sewage Treatment Plant in Boston Harbor into fertilizer pellets.

As part of a \$146 million, 15-year contract between the MWRA and the New England Fertilizer Co., which operates the plant, the state authority is entitled to up to 900 tons of pellets each year that it can either sell or donate. Unused pellets go back into the general silo at the end of the year, Convery said. The firm's contract expires Dec. 15, 2015.

State Auditor Joe DeNucci found the MWRA's efforts to sell or donate the pellets had declined by 75 percent in recent years.