

## Compost fire near airport to burn into the night

By Julie Chang, American-Statesman Staff

Updated: 10:34 p.m. Monday, Feb. 25, 2013

10:30 p.m. update: Winds are too high for officials to battle the compost fire near the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

Officials plan to start extinguishing the fire, which is burning like hot coals, when winds die down - probably sometime in the morning, Austin Water Utility's Jason Hill said.

Austin Fire Department will be monitoring the fire overnight.

The compost is the solid byproduct of the waste water treatment process.

"When you flush your toilet, the solids that go down goes to the waste water system," Hill said. "When it gets to the plant, we have processes that take out solids from the waste water."

The burning compost is not toxic, but officials responded to health calls from residents to the south of the Hornsby Bend Water Treatment Plant, Hill said.

He said that the compost piles, which are more than 10 feet tall, could take a couple days to extinguish.

The smoke is no longer causing major reductions in visibility on FM 973.

6:30 p.m. update: The compost fires near the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport has been mostly contained.

Although heavy, the smoke is lifting a little and is not toxic, Austin Water Utility's Jason Hill said.

Earlier:

Compost piles near the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport have caught on fire, causing low visibility in the area, according to Austin Water Utility.

The fires started at the the Hornsby Bend Water Treatment Plant on FM 973 near Colorado River Bridge about 3 p.m.

The compost piles, which are constantly reacting chemically, ignited because of the high winds, utility spokesman Jason Hill said.

The Austin Fire Department said that the wind is blowing the embers into area fields causing small fires. Firefighters are on scene working to contain it.

The airport is also reporting traffic light outages in the area and urges fliers to give ample time to commute.