



City of Austin's Dillo Dirt program to expand

by QUITA CULPEPPER / KVUE News

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In Austin, hundreds of thousands of people make sure to recycle cardboard, cans, and paper, but there is another popular recycling program you may not even think about, and now it is getting ready to expand.

With more and more people moving into Austin, the city is seeing more and more sewage. That is what the popular soil conditioner, Dillo Dirt, is made of.

Yard and tree trimmings and all the sewage sludge from the city are broken down, treated, and combined to make the nutrient-rich, safe fertilizer.

"It works great on lawns and flower gardens," said Jody Slagle, who oversees the program. "Remember when we walk out into a forest or any place out in the grass? That soil was built on poop."

Slagle says a \$31.8 million stimulus grant allowed the city to upgrade the Hornsby Bend Treatment Plant and add a new 15-acre composting pad.

"We designed it to accommodate up to 36 of our piles of active compost," Slagle said.

Austin's Water Utility expects to go from making 40,000 cubic yards of Dillo Dirt to 80,000. That equals about 80,000 pickup trucks full of dirt.

It is a dirty job that pays off. The expansion will put more money into the city's pockets as Austin gardeners and vendors continue to buy Dillo Dirt by the truckload.

"We currently make \$400,000 to \$500,000 in revenue," Slagle said. "Hopefully when we double the program, we'll be making twice that much. It's looked at across the nation as one of the examples of a truly successful program. It's something for Austin to be proud of."