



## Review

# Meta-analysis of non-reactive phosphorus in water, wastewater, and sludge, and strategies to convert it for enhanced phosphorus removal and recovery



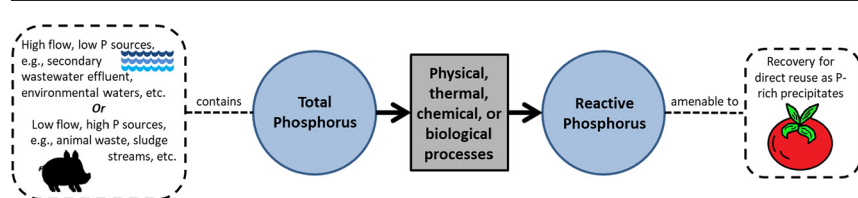
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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Meta-analysis reveals non-reactive P (NRP) comprises a substantial portion of total P.
- NRP must be physically, chemically, or biologically converted to soluble RP for recovery.
- No technologies have been implemented to recover soluble NRP from water matrices.
- P conversion processes must be specifically tested in water, wastewater, and sludge.

## GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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## ABSTRACT

Current and future trends indicate that mining of natural phosphorus (P) reserves is occurring faster than natural geologic replenishment. This mobilization has not only led to P supply concerns, but has also polluted many of the world's freshwater bodies and oceans. Recovery and reuse of this nuisance P offers a long-term solution simultaneously addressing mineral P accessibility and P-based pollution. Available physical, chemical, and biological P removal/recovery processes can achieve low total P (TP) concentrations ( $\leq 100 \mu\text{g/L}$ ) and some processes can also recover P for direct reuse as fertilizers (e.g., struvite). However, as shown by our meta-analysis of over 20,000 data points on P quantity and P form, the P in water matrices is not always present in the reactive P (RP) form that is most amenable to recovery for direct reuse. Thus, strategies for removing and recovering other P fractions in water/wastewater are essential to provide environmental protection via P removal and also advance the circular P economy via P recovery. Specifically, conversion of non-reactive P (NRP) to the more readily removable/recoverable RP form may offer a feasible approach; however, extremely limited data on such applications currently exist. This review investigates the role of NRP in various water matrices; identifies NRP conversion mechanisms; and evaluates biological, physical, thermal, and chemical processes with potential to enhance P removal and recovery by converting the NRP to RP. This information provides critical insights into future research needs and technology advancements to enhance P removal and recovery.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Phosphorus as a critical nutrient and a pollutant

Paradoxically, phosphorus (P) is simultaneously an important non-renewable agricultural nutrient and an environmental pollutant. On one hand, modern human society depends on P to sustain the global

food supply. Rapid increases in human population and the subsequent need for high agricultural productivity have led to substantial increases in fertilizer use. Currently, P is primarily obtained from subsurface mining of phosphate minerals. Unfortunately, these mineral P resources replenish on geologic time scales, making P an essentially non-renewable resource, characterized by rapidly depleting finite reserves. This, coupled with the fact that 90% of minable P is found in only five

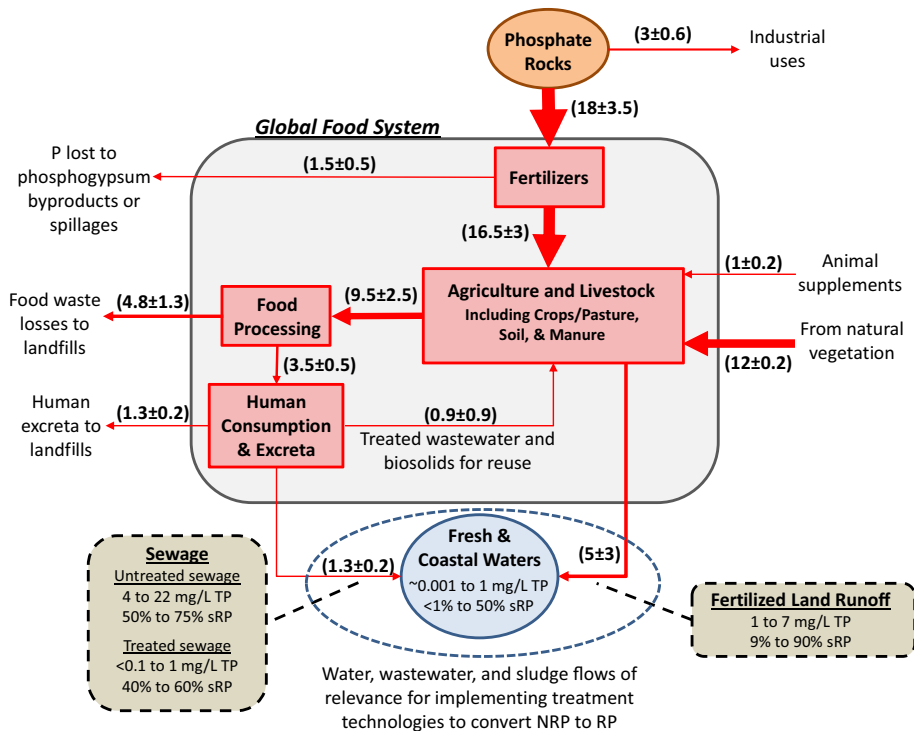


Fig. 1. Anthropogenic phosphorus (P) flows (million metric tonnes of P per year) for global food production, adapted from Cordell and White (2014). The thickness of each arrow indicates the relative magnitude of each P flow. The majority of mined P (18 ± 3.5 million tonnes of P per year) is used in fertilizers, approximately 35% (6.3 ± 3 million tonnes of P per year) of which is lost to surface waters. Soluble reactive P (sRP) accounts for a majority of total P (TP) in many waters, but a substantial proportion of the TP in point source sewage and sludge, non-point runoff, and environmental waters can consist of non-reactive P (NRP), which may be more difficult to remove and is not directly recoverable.

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