

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

ANIMAL MORTALITY FACILITY

(No.)

CODE 316

DEFINITION

An on-farm facility for the treatment or disposal of livestock and poultry carcasses.

PURPOSE

This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system to support one or more of the following purposes:

- To decrease non-point source pollution of surface and ground water resources
- To reduce the impact of odors that result from improperly handled animal mortality
- To decrease the likelihood of the spread of disease or other pathogens that result from the interaction of animal mortality and predators
- To provide contingencies for normal and catastrophic mortality events

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies where animal carcass treatment or disposal must be considered as a component of a waste management system for livestock or poultry operations. It applies where on-farm carcass treatment and disposal are permitted by federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations. It also applies where a waste management system plan as described in the National Engineering Handbook (NEH), Part 651, Agricultural Waste Management Field Handbook (AWMFH) has been developed that accounts for the end use of the product from the mortality facility. This practice includes disposal of both normal and catastrophic animal mortality; however, it does not apply to catastrophic mortality resulting from disease.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

The facility shall be designed to handle normal mortality and/or catastrophic mortality.

The planning and design of animal mortality facilities or processes must conform to all federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations. This includes provisions for closing and/or removing the facility where required.

All structural components integral to animal mortality management shall meet the structural loads and design criteria as described in Conservation Practice Standard 313, Waste Storage Facility, unless otherwise designated.

Where an animal mortality facility can be damaged by surface runoff, the runoff shall be diverted away from the facility.

Location. The location shall minimize the impact of the facility on odor and other air quality issues affecting neighboring residences as well as minimizing the impact of the facility on surface and ground water resources. In addition, the facility (where practical) shall be generally down gradient from a spring or well.

The animal mortality facility shall be located outside the 100-year flood plain; however if site restrictions require location within a flood plain, the facility shall be protected from inundation or damage.

The location of the animal mortality facility shall be consistent with the overall site plan for the livestock or poultry operation.

Seepage control. Where seepage from mortality facilities will create a potential water quality problem and it is deemed necessary to reduce seepage, use AWMFH, Appendix 10D, for clay liner design criteria or other acceptable liner technology.

Criteria Applicable to All Purposes – Normal Mortality

The facility shall be located as close to the source of mortality as practical, considering bio-security issues and the need to keep the facility out of sight of the general public.

Composters

- **General.** Design of facilities for composting animal mortality shall conform to Conservation Practice Standard 317, Composting Facility, or the guidance in NEH Part 637, Environmental Engineering, Part 637.0211.

Freezers

- **General.** Freezer units shall be of the chest type with a construction compatible with the mechanism to be used to empty the freezer. Provisions for protecting the freezer unit from precipitation and direct sun shall be made as deemed appropriate.

The freezer unit design, construction, power source, and unit installation shall be in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations. Freezers shall be constructed of durable material with a life expectancy compatible with other aspects of the waste management system. The freezer container shall be leakproof to minimize odor and leachate pollution.

Where needed, the freezer will be placed on a pad of suitable strength to withstand loads imposed with vehicular traffic consistent with equipment used to load or remove the box or tray.

- **Temperature.** The freezers shall be self-contained units designed to freeze animal carcasses before decomposition occurs. For best results, the temperature of the carcasses shall be maintained between 22° and 26° F.

- **Capacity.** Freezer units shall be sized to accommodate the normal maximum volume of mortality to be expected in the interval between emptying. Volume calculations shall include the expected mortality rate of the animal, the period of time between emptying where mortality is given on a per day basis, the average weight of the animal between emptying, and a conversion factor for weight to volume. For broiler operations, use a weight to volume conversion of a minimum of 45 pounds per cubic foot. Capacity calculations shall be supported by a removal schedule supplied by an integrator or approved vendor.
- **Power source.** An alternative source of power, where available, shall be used to maintain the integrity of the freezing process during power outages. Where an alternative power source will not be available, the operation and maintenance plan shall contain contingencies for disposal of the animal mortality.

Disposal pit

- **General.** Disposal pits shall not be located on sites with one of the following:
 1. Highly permeable soils or overfractured or cavernous bedrock within 2 feet of the bottom of the pit unless an approved liner is used
 2. Soils with a seasonal high water table less than 2 feet from the bottom of the pit
- **Size and capacity.** Pits shall be sized to accommodate the normal mortality in accordance with criteria acceptable to state and local regulatory agencies. The disposal pit shall be a minimum of 4 feet wide and 4 feet long. No minimum depth is required, but the selected depth shall accommodate 2 feet of cover over the mortality. Multiple pits shall be separated by a minimum of 3 feet of undisturbed or compacted soil.

Structural loading and design. Vehicular traffic shall not be allowed within 4 feet of the pit structure. Fences or other barriers shall be used to exclude vehicles where necessary.

The disposal pit shall be cased with masonry blocks, treated timber, or a pre-cast concrete

septic tank conforming to American Society of Testing Materials (ASTM) C 1227, Standard Specification for Pre-Cast Septic Tanks. In all cases, the bottom of the pit shall remain exposed to the soil. If the pre-cast septic tank is used, it shall be fabricated with three 6-inch openings in each end, and five 6-inch openings in each side. When masonry blocks are used, every fourth block in each course shall be laid sideways (openings toward the outside) except the top and bottom courses. The bottom course shall be on a reinforced concrete footing of at least 1 foot wide and 6 inches thick. When treated timbers are used for walls, a 1-inch spacing shall be left between timbers.

For pits that are 4 to 5 feet deep, a step or bench 18 inches wide and 1 foot deep shall be dug around the perimeter of the main pit so the remaining vertical wall shall not exceed 4 feet. For pits greater than 5 feet deep, the earthen wall shall be sloped back at 1 1/2 horizontal to 1 vertical or flatter.

The top of a disposal pit shall be covered with a slab constructed of reinforced concrete or treated timber having an appropriately sized hole for a drop chute. A pit over 8 feet long shall have drop chutes every 5 feet and a minimum of 2 drop chutes. The drop chutes shall be appropriately covered and made of drainage tile or concrete, clay, or polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe. A 10-inch opening is recommended for chickens, and a 12-inch opening is recommended for turkeys and suckling pigs.

Incinerators

- **General.** Incinerators shall be dual-burning and Type 4 (human and animal remains) that are approved for use within the state.
- **Capacity.** Minimum incinerator capacity shall be based on the average daily weight of animal mortality and the length of time the incinerator will be operated each day.
- **Location.** The incinerator shall be located a minimum of 20 feet from any structure. The incinerator shall be placed on a concrete pad with the fuel source as distant as practical. If the incinerator is covered with a roof, at least 6 inches are required between the incinerator chimney and any combustible roof parts.

Criteria Applicable to All Purposes – Catastrophic Mortality

- **General.** Processes addressed by this standard shall be limited to burial and composting. Catastrophic mortality shall be collected as soon as practical and moved away from the production facility.
- **Location.** The facility shall be located as far away from neighboring dwellings and the poultry or livestock operation as site conditions permit. Locate on sites with restricted percolation and a minimum of 2 feet between the bottom of the facility and the seasonal high water table unless special design features are incorporated that address seepage rates and non-encroachment of contaminants into the water table. Use AWMFH Appendix 10D for selection of sites where seepage will be restricted with normal construction techniques.

Burial pit

- **General.** Catastrophic mortality resulting from natural conditions such as temperature extremes shall be buried on-site or as otherwise directed by state and local regulatory agencies. Burial of catastrophic mortality shall be timed to minimize the effects of mortality expansion during early stages of the decay process. Where possible and permitted by state law, mortality shall remain uncovered or lightly covered until bloating has occurred. Mortality can be covered if methods are employed to reduce or eliminate bloating. Topsoil shall be retained to re-grade the disposal site after the ground has settled as the decay process is completed. Stockpiled soil shall be no closer than 20 feet from the edge of the burial pit.
- **Size and capacity.** Pits shall be sized to accommodate catastrophic mortality using appropriate weight to volume conversions. Capacity shall be in accordance with criteria acceptable to state and local regulatory agencies. The burial pit shall be a minimum of 4 feet wide with length necessary to accommodate mortality. Depth shall accommodate a minimum of 2 feet of cover over the mortality. Pit bottoms shall be relatively level. Lengths may be limited by

soil suitability and slope. If more than 1 pit is required, they shall be separated by a minimum of 3 feet of undisturbed or compacted soil. The burial site shall be of sufficient volume to contain the mortality with a minimum of 2 feet of soil cover. The burial site shall be finish-graded to slightly above natural ground elevation to accommodate settling.

Structural loading and design. Vehicular traffic shall not be allowed within 4 feet of the pit edge.

For pits that are 4 to 5 feet deep, a step or bench 18 inches wide and 1 foot deep will be dug around the perimeter of the main pit so the remaining vertical wall will not exceed 4 feet. For pits greater than 5 feet deep, the earthen wall shall be sloped back at 1 1/2 horizontal to 1 vertical or flatter.

Composting

General. Catastrophic mortality composting shall be in either passive piles or windrows as described in NEH Part 637.0211.

Composting mortality shall be protected from precipitation as necessary or provisions made for collecting contaminated runoff. Static piles or windrows covered with sawdust, finished compost, or other benign material will not need further protection; however, the collection and handling of any contaminated runoff would be required.

CONSIDERATIONS

Major considerations in planning animal mortality management are the following:

- Available equipment at the operation
- The management capabilities of the operator
- The degree of pollution control required by state and local agencies,
- The economics of the available alternatives
- Effect on neighbors

Consideration should be given to prevailing wind direction and neighbors when siting animal mortality disposal facilities. A minimum of 900 feet should separate the facility from the nearest neighboring residence; and the facility should be 200 feet from a well, spring, or water course.

Runoff from the livestock or poultry facility or from outside areas should be diverted away from the animal mortality disposal facility.

Composting of poultry mortality will be hindered if the bird carcasses are allowed to freeze. Birds should be kept in a dry, non-freezing environment until added to the compost mix.

Facility sizes for composting large animal carcasses should reflect the longer compost periods required.

The following table lists factors that could be used in determining minimum daily weight of animal mortality when sizing incinerators:

<u>Type of Animal</u>	<u>Daily Loss Factor (pounds/day/animal)</u>
Chicken:	
Broilers	0.0024
Laying hens	0.0014
Breeding hens	0.0019
Breeders, male	0.0082
Turkeys:	
Hens	0.0081
Toms, light	0.0193
Toms, feather production	0.0286
Swine:	
Suckling pigs (per sow)	0.0400

Poultry operations often experience higher rates of mortality as the birds reach maturity. The capacity of incinerators should be sized to ensure the mortality of the large birds can be handled within the time frame allowed for incineration.

An alternative to prevent bloating of catastrophic mortality die off could include opening animal thoracic and abdominal cavities and viscera prior to placing required cover.

Incineration produces varying quantities of ash that will need to be properly handled.

Vegetative screens and topography can be used to shield the animal disposal facility from public view and to minimize visual impact.

State requirements for record keeping vary. Items such as burial site location, type and quantity of mortality, burial date, and other pertinent details should be noted at the time of burial.

Operators should maintain a list of current phone numbers for state and local officials to aid in notification if disease-related catastrophic mortality occurs.

Safety devices such as fencing, warning signs, and freezer locks may be necessary at certain sites.

Bio-security concerns should be addressed in all aspects of planning, installation, and operation and maintenance of an animal mortality facility.

Ground-disturbing activities such as excavation and site preparation for disposal facilities have the potential to affect significant cultural resources.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An operation and maintenance plan applicable to this practice that includes, but is not limited to, the items listed below will be developed with the operator and will become a part of the overall waste management system plan. The requirements in the individual operation and maintenance plan shall be consistent with the practice purposes, intended life, and design criteria. Safety considerations shall be prominently displayed in the plan.

Normal mortality. Animal mortality facilities will normally be operated or used on a daily basis.

At each operation or use, the facility shall be inspected to note any maintenance needs or indicators of operation problems.

Catastrophic mortality. Possible locations for catastrophic animal mortality facilities shall be located during the planning process to be operated as needed.

Burial of catastrophic mortality shall be timed to minimize the effects of mortality expansion during early stages of the decay process. Where possible and permitted by state law, mortality shall remain uncovered or lightly covered until bloating has occurred. Some topsoil shall be retained to re-grade the disposal site after the ground has settled as the decay process is largely completed.

Where composting is used for catastrophic mortality disposal, the operation and maintenance plan shall identify the most likely compost medium, possible compost recipes, operational information, and equipment that will need to be readily available.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for animal mortality facilities shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying this practice to achieve its intended purpose.