

Disposal Recommendations for North Carolina Turkey and Poultry Farms

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BACKGROUND:

The State of North Carolina geographically lies in the path of seasonal hurricanes and has historically been deeply impacted by these regular weather events. Additionally, the State has a robust livestock industry and ranks third nationally in poultry production and second in pork production. Severe weather events and infectious disease have the potential to cause large numbers of animal mortality in the State. Effective methods for disposing of this mortality are critical to maintain public health, animal health, and environmental quality.

Numerous techniques have evolved for the disposal of livestock including burial, land-filling, incineration and chemical treatment, however all techniques have significant shortcomings. In-house composting of poultry is a disposal technique that has gained much interest and significant industry acceptance because of its many advantages and relatively few drawbacks. The technique has undergone significant testing, both in research trials and in actual agricultural events.

TECHNIQUE:

The disposal technique of in house composting is typically chosen when the poultry have died or are euthanized within the poultry house. The bird mortalities are piled into the windrows through the middle of the house. Once all birds have been added to the compost windrow, a minimum 24 inch top layer of litter is added. The compost windrow will remain in the house for a period of 14 days. This allows for the initial composting temperature to rise and kill the majority of infectious agents. Following the initial 14 days, the windrow piles could be turned and restacked in the house or more often are moved to an alternative location allowing for cleaning and repopulation of the affected barns.

ADVANTAGES:

In house composting offers the following advantages:

1. **Biosecure:** Movement of the infectious organism impedes the eradication efforts. By composting the birds in the house, an initial pathogen kill takes place prior to movement of the mortalities

2. Quick response time: Unlike many disposal techniques, no special equipment is necessary. In fact, equipment and personnel required to complete in house composting is often already present on the premises.
3. Efficient use of responders: This quick response time offers the response crews more time to respond to additional premises.
4. Environmentally friendly: This technique is also environmentally friendly in that the agent is contained within the house, any leachate is absorbed and all emissions are bio-filtered through the bedding material.
5. Cost Effective: As stated before, no special equipment or personnel are required.

SUMMARY:

In house composting is a sound method of disposal of poultry mortality and should be considered whenever the disposal of a large number of poultry mortality is necessary. Nevertheless, there exist numerous other valid disposal technologies that may be more appropriate based on the specific circumstances of the event, including the cause of the mortality, weather, geographical location and other unforeseen factors.

Under NC statute § 106-403, Disposition of Dead Domesticated Animals, the disposal method for livestock mortality must be through burial or other method approved by the State Veterinarian. Therefore, if you are faced with the problem of mass poultry mortality contact your State Veterinarian for recommendations of your individual problem.