



A guide to dead stock disposal



Dead stock pit

Managing dead stock is a challenge for all farms in Southland. Thousands of animals die on farm every year, requiring carcasses to be disposed of to reduce negative impacts on animal health, water quality and human health.

As animal carcasses decompose they release ammonia, nitrogen, phosphorus and bacteria that can contaminate ground and surface waters. Carcass disposal can also create other issues like odour, smoke and pests affecting the farm and neighbours.

The best dead stock disposal method is to engage a business that does this for you, although this is not always possible. One of the most common ways to manage dead stock in Southland is to put them in a pit or offal hole. This method is cheap and practical but is risky if located in the wrong place and not designed correctly.

► Location tips

- Locate the pit on elevated ground like a terrace or below a ridge, sheltered from the prevailing wind.
- Avoid gullies, critical source areas, river beds, waterways, wetlands, gravel areas or land that floods or ponds during high rainfall.
- Implement appropriate buffers including 50m from waterways, 100m from water abstraction points, 100m from dwellings and boundaries, and 250m from drinkable water abstraction points.
- Ensure the pit does not intercept a subsurface drain or is excavated below the water table.
- Ensure carcasses cannot touch naturally formed limestone rock.



Mixing carcasses with other rubbish and burning produces polluting leachate and smoke

► Design and management tips

- Keep dead stock pits separate from other rubbish pits to prevent creating an acidic leachate that could contain hazardous chemicals and heavy metals that pollute water and soils.
- A long trench keeping within the topsoil is better than a square hole as it is easier to cover carcasses in soil.
- Apply 0.5m thick layer of fine sand or silt on the floor of the pit.
- Divert storm and surface water from entering the hole.
- Keep pit depth above seasonal mean groundwater levels.
- Carefully consider buffers, and where possible go beyond the minimum setbacks required to protect ground and surface waters.

► Burning dead stock

Burning carcasses is not recommended but could be an option when the water table is too high to bury. This provides an effective way of avoiding problems with vermin or spreading disease. Burning should be done in a way that minimises effects on neighbours and reduces fire risks by staying away from houses and property boundaries. While you will need to maintain a high combustion temperature, remember it is illegal to use tyres and plastics as accelerants. As with any burning, take necessary precautions around weather conditions, fire bans or fire permits at the time.

► Large numbers of dead stock

If you have large numbers of dead stock to deal with, contact Environment Southland for advice on the options that may be available. These may include taking the stock to landfill, scoping areas on the farm for low risk decomposition, and finding out if any businesses are taking dead stock at that time.

More information

You'll find more helpful information on these websites:

- Environment Southland – www.es.govt.nz
- DairyNZ – www.dairynz.co.nz
- Beef + Lamb – www.beeflambnz.com

Further assistance

For advice on dead stock management call us to arrange a free visit by Environment Southland's land sustainability team on 0800 76 88 45.