

# EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OF HOLDING PONDS DURING WET WEATHER

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in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality*

Many areas of Nebraska have experienced higher than normal precipitation events recently, with some areas receiving rainfall that far exceeded a 25-year, 24-hour storm event. This abnormally wet weather pattern has caused drainage and flooding issues in some parts of the state. The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality and Nebraska Extension would like to remind producers and landowners to be vigilant in monitoring lagoon and runoff holding pond levels.

The NDEQ and NE Extension have partnered to issue the following recommended practices for emergency management of runoff holding ponds during this period of unusually wet weather:

- DO NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLDING POND TO OVERFLOW!** Over-topping earthen berms may compromise the berm integrity and cause a much more catastrophic discharge. Likewise, discharge of this highly concentrated effluent is likely to cause fish kills if it enters a water body.
- Application to saturated soils is preferable to allowing a storage basin to overflow. Building up earthen berms with soil or sandbags to increase storage capacity should not be attempted.
- When applying effluent to saturated soil, it is preferable to apply to vegetated areas such as pasture or hay to reduce the potential for runoff. If vegetated land is not available, apply to land with high amounts of crop residue. Application to bare soil should be a last resort.
- It may be necessary to utilize land that is not included in your nutrient management plan or permit for application of effluent. Keep in mind that all relevant management practices in your NMP and permit must still be followed. Complete records of applications should be maintained and submitted with your year-end report to DEQ.
- Utilize land with the least possible slope to minimize runoff potential from effluent application.
- Operate irrigation equipment at a minimal application rate to minimize runoff potential.
- Greater separation distances between application areas and water bodies than what is dictated by current regulations should be used when possible. Under NDEQ regulations (Title 130, Chapter 9, Sections 006 and 008), **small and medium animal feeding operations** may not apply manure or effluent closer than 30 feet from any streams, lakes and impounded waters and **large concentrated animal feeding operations** may not apply manure or process waste water closer than 100 feet from any down-gradient surface waters, open tile line intake structures, well heads, or other conduits to surface or ground water. Exceptions include one of two compliance alternatives substituted for the application setback requirement:
  - A 35-foot wide vegetated buffer where the application of manure or process waste water is prohibited; or
  - Satisfactory demonstration that an alternative conservation practice provides pollutant reduction equal to or better than what would be achieved by the 100-foot setback.
- Pumping operations should be monitored continuously to minimize potential for runoff or equipment malfunction. Runoff during land application must not occur and points of potential runoff around the perimeter of the land application area should be observed throughout the pumping process.
- If runoff from land application or discharge from a holding pond occurs, emergency secondary containment may be utilized as defined in your farm's emergency response plan.
- Call the NDEQ Agriculture Section at (402) 471-4239 or the appropriate field office (see below) if a discharge occurs; leave a message if your call is not answered.
- Maintain detailed records of pond levels and pumping times.
- If you need assistance determining how best to manage specific wet weather conditions on your farm, contact your NDEQ Field Inspector.

**Remember: Record-keeping is always recommended and is required for all permitted operations!**

During periods of unusual weather, it is particularly important to keep complete and detailed records of precipitation, storage basin management, and land application.

## For additional information:

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## NDEQ Offices

**Lincoln Agriculture Section:** (402) 471-4239  
**Grand Island Field Office:** (308) 991-1262  
**Holdrege Field Office:** (308) 991-1780  
**Norfolk Field Office:** (402) 679-2497  
or (402) 750-4563  
**North Platte Field Office:** (308) 530-0874  
**Scottsbluff Field Office:** (308) 765-9293

