

**Directions:** *This template has been developed to assist with the basic procedures for mortality management. It is the responsibility of the farmer to complete this form in accordance to their dairy operation. It should be reviewed on an annual basis to address any changes that have occurred with individual practices. Contact your state and local agencies to verify mortality disposal compliance.*

Farm Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date last reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual or position responsible for this process: \_\_\_\_\_

**Objective:** To dispose of mortality cases in compliance with state and environmental regulations, as well as minimizing these processes from public view.

The best method for disposal is a rendering plant; however, if this option is not available, the following are legal alternatives to rendering:

#### **Natural Disposal**

- It is legal to simply allow nature to take its course. The dead animal carcass may be hauled to a location at least one-half mile from any off-farm dwelling and at least one-quarter from any water way and let scavengers destroy the carcass. You need a large farm or ranch to make this work and it is the least desirable of the alternatives for obvious reasons.

#### **Landfill**

- Certain permitted landfills are allowed to take small and large animal carcasses. There may be an extra fee for large carcasses. Call the landfill nearest you to find out if they can accept your animals. If the landfill is not allowed to dispose of dead animals, your state's environmental quality agency may be able to grant an exception. You should work with the landfill operator and local environmental office to see if an exception is possible.

#### **Incineration**

- Animal carcasses can be burned only to control disease emergencies as approved by the State Veterinarian. You must have additional fuel such as straw or dry wood to help the fire to burn hot enough to burn the entire carcass. The fire should be monitored so that the carcass is completely burned. Any parts of the animal not burned should be buried as described below.

#### **Burial**

- This will probably require a backhoe because an adult cow burial takes a hole approximately 2' x 7' x 8' deep. The bottom of the hole must be dry (not in a water table), and the dead animal should be covered with hydrated lime, and covered with at least 4' of soil mounded up to allow for settling as the carcass decomposes. Burials should be at least 500' from surface waters or wells, preferably downhill.

## Composting

- While not the simplest method of disposal, composting animal mortalities allows you to recycle the nutrients in the carcasses and is a sound environmental practice. If you are going to compost on the farm, you may need a composting plan on file with your state's agriculture department. The plan must include a drawing of your composting area, a description of how you contain run-off from the piles or bins, a description of the process you will use, and a description of how the compost will be used on the farm. Contact your state's agriculture department for plan details and assistance.
- The basic composting process is relatively easy, but it is more than putting an animal in a manure pile. It must be done on concrete or a similar impervious surface that prevents nutrient leaching. It is wise to have a roof to control moisture added by rainfall. Bins or walls on the compost pile make turning the compost easier. To compost dead animals, start with a 12" layer of dry straw or dry manure solids. Drag or life the carcass onto this layer. A small opening in the body cavity will prevent bloating. Some sources recommend cutting open the body cavity and large muscle groups for faster decomposition; however, livestock farmers report this is not necessary. Cover the carcass with 3' of manure solids.
- Maintain moisture in the pile about like silage; damp, not wet. Add more manure solids and water as needed. The pile must heat to over a 131° F for 3 days to kill human pathogens. The pile will be ready to turn in about 30 days and will need to be turned about 5 times. The carcass should be fully composted in about 180 days. Apparently bone residue is not a problem. The compost can be spread on crop fields as the heating destroys disease-causing bacteria.