

Farm waste management



Environment
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Overview

Good waste management on farms is essential to ensure a healthy, safe and productive farming enterprise. Farmers, along with all Victorians, have obligations under legislation to ensure that their wastes do not impact on the environment.

Inappropriate disposal of wastes on farms can cause contamination and pollution, and increase your liability.

This guideline provides good practice waste management for farmers to minimise the potential for liability.

Why is waste management an issue?

'Clean and green' agriculture is of increasing importance in the marketing of Australian produce, both domestically and overseas.

Appropriate management of farm wastes can benefit your farm by preventing:

- contamination impacting property value
- contamination of the land and water on your farm
- breeding sites for disease spreading mosquitos, pest animals and predators
- contamination of produce
- stock injury, disease or death
- offensive odours
- large penalties and cleanup costs from poor waste management.

Industrial Waste Resource Guideline

Access to alternative disposal and recycling programs now provides farmers with more options for dealing with their waste.

EPA encourages waste disposal options in the following order of preference:

Avoid or reduce the production of wastes

When purchasing materials consider the costs of disposal. Effective waste management begins with purchasing only what you need.

Reuse and recycle wastes whenever possible

When purchasing materials it is important to check that the components and packaging can be easily reused or recycled. Sort all product waste into categories such as compost, recycling, empty drums, oil products, chemicals and general waste, so they can be efficiently reused, recycled or disposed of.

Ensure that wastes are stored appropriately prior to reuse, recycling or disposal to avoid contamination of the environment or harm to people, animals or produce.

Treat wastes where appropriate

Green wastes can be composted and reused as a fertiliser and soil conditioner. Composting green wastes will assist in destroying weed seeds.

Dispose of wastes only where permitted

You should not dispose of household rubbish, unwanted chemicals, waste oils or lubricants on your property due to the high risk of contamination of land, water or air.

Waste products that cannot be reused, recycled, composted or treated must be disposed of at a waste transfer station or appropriate landfill.

Licensed commercial waste disposal companies may also be an option for removing wastes from your farm. Search online for contacts, or for licensed waste treaters, disposers and permitted transports at <https://portal.epa.vic.gov.au/irj/portal/>



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Waste types and how to manage them

Scrap metals/used wire

Metal that can be reused for future works should be safely stored.

Any metal that cannot be reused may have recycling potential, even if it is rusted or burnt. Some companies will pay for and collect scrap metal.

For details of a metal recycler in your area, contact your regional waste and resource recovery group (WRRG) or your local council.

Find details of your local waste and recycling centre at <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/Government/Waste-and-resource-recovery/Council-waste-and-recycling-centres>

Other wastes that can be collected/recycled include used fencing wire, vehicle bodies, and corrugated iron.

Masonry – concrete, bricks and tiles

Concrete and clean bricks may be reused for engineering works on your farm, provided the material is designed and suitable for the purpose, and is free from contamination from metal, plastics, chemicals and asbestos. Acceptable engineering works include the construction of farm tracks and pads.

If you accept wastes for disposal from other sources, reuse materials that are unsuitable for the purpose (industrial wastes etc.) or fill areas of the farm with demolition material, you may be liable for illegal dumping, contamination, pollution and cleanup.

Recycling facilities for masonry wastes are now available in most areas of Victoria; contact your WRRG or local council for further information.

Asbestos

Asbestos, in particular friable asbestos products, poses health risks when asbestos fibres are inhaled during removal, transport and disposal. It is important that asbestos be handled appropriately during these operations.

The disposal of waste asbestos, whether of industrial or domestic origin, is controlled by EPA. In addition, EPA controls the transportation of asbestos of industrial (including commercial or trade) origin.

The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 cover processing and handling asbestos in the workplace. Any concerns about asbestos in the workplace should be discussed with

WorkSafe Victoria. Contact the Environmental Health Officer in your local council regarding any concerns about asbestos in domestic situations.

Products made from asbestos should not be reused and cannot be recycled. These wastes must be handled appropriately and disposed of safely at a licensed landfill. There are WorkSafe-licensed removal contractors available to perform this task.

If you are unsure or suspect you have asbestos materials, get someone to confirm this prior to removal. Asbestos products found on farms include: AC sheeting, buildings, cladding, lagging, roofing and pipes.

Contact your local council for details of landfills that accept asbestos, or visit www.asbestos.vic.gov.au to find licensed removalists.

Refer to [IWRG611 Asbestos transport and disposal](#) for information on how to handle asbestos disposal appropriately. Further information on asbestos handling and disposal can also be found on the health.vic.gov.au webpage.

Empty chemical drums and used containers

All empty chemical drums should be triple-rinsed immediately after use to prevent the chemical residue from solidifying in the drum.

Triple-rinsing should be directly into the spray tank for reuse. If this is not possible, the drums should be rinsed in an area where the rinse water is not released into the environment (including waterways) or impact on people, stock or produce.

Used containers can often be reused for repackaging and should be returned to the retailer.

Where containers are non-returnable, the following disposal options are available:

- DrumMUSTER is a national program for the collection and recycling of non-returnable, empty, cleaned crop production and on-farm animal health chemical containers. Eligible containers are identified by a DrumMUSTER logo (sticker, label or embossed). For further information contact your local council, visit the DrumMUSTER website www.drummuster.org.au or phone (02) 6206 6868.
- If the container is not eligible for DrumMUSTER, it should be triple rinsed, then punctured in the base and recycled or disposed of to appropriately licensed landfill. Contact your local council for details of transfer stations or recycling services.

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- Rigid containers larger than 200 litres must be reused or recycled, they cannot be sent to landfill. See www.drummuster.org.au/container-recycling/the-abcs-for-your-ibcs for more details on how to recycle your IBCs.

All empty containers should be stored in a safe area on the farm prior to reuse, recycling or disposal. Refer to [Liquid storage and handling guidelines](#) (EPA publication 1698) for further information.

Chemicals (unwanted or excess)

ChemClear is a program to collect unwanted rural chemicals manufactured by member companies of Avicare and the Veterinary Manufacturers and Distribution Association (VDMA).

Users of agricultural and veterinary chemicals who need to dispose of their unwanted chemicals must register their products on the ChemClear website www.chemclear.com.au or by telephoning 1800 008 182.

Oil and oil filters

Used oil is a valuable resource and can be collected from your farm by waste oil collection contractors (there may be minimum volumes for collection) or you can deliver it to a transfer station equipped with oil collection facilities. Please contact your council for further details of sites that can accept waste oil.

Used oil filters have a classification that prohibits their disposal to landfill because used oil filters can be recycled to recover both the metal and oil. Drain and segregate them by type and size, and have them collected by an approved EPA transporter. See [IWRG423 Oil filters – Classification for reuse](#) for more details on recycling oil filters. There may also be options for oil filters to be disposed of at a waste transfer station.

Using waste oil as a dust suppressant will cause contamination of the land and may cause pollution of surface or groundwaters. The cleanup cost and potential impact on property value may result in significant liability to your farm.

Where there is a possibility that soil contamination has occurred (for example, from chemical or fuel/oil spills) you should contact EPA for further guidance.

Tyres

Tyres can be used for legitimate on-farm use (for example, on silage stacks), but should not be brought onto the farm for disposal. When not being used, tyres should be stored to minimise fire risk. Tyres lying around on a farm can become a breeding site for snakes, predators and other vermin.

Waste tyres must not be:

- used for bulking material in civil engineering works
- used for erosion control works
- used for assisting burning (for example, stumps, dead stock)
- used for drains constructed from half tyres
- used as tree guards
- buried or burnt.

An EPA works approval or licence is required to store more than 40 tonnes or 5,000 EPUs of waste tyres.

See [Using waste tyres on farms and other private property](#) (EPA publication 1652) for more information about using and storing waste tyres.

If tyres cannot be reused on your farm, contact your WRRG or council for an appropriate recycling or disposal location.

Dead stock

Dead stock should be sent to the knackery or rendering plant for reuse or to an appropriately licensed landfill for disposal. If this is not possible, limited numbers of dead stock can be buried on a farm, as long as the burial site does not adversely impact the land, surface waters, groundwaters or the air (odour).

The dead stock from intensive animal industries such as piggeries, feedlots and broiler or egg farms must not be buried on a farm without EPA approval.

To reduce environmental impacts, an on-farm burial site should be set up as follows:

- on elevated land with a slope of less than five per cent, to allow proper drainage and prevent pooling of water following a rain event
- at least two metres between the watertable and the base of the pit, considering site specific geology and impact into groundwater
- at least 200 metres from any surface waters
- at least 300 metres from neighbouring houses
- avoiding highly or moderately permeable soils.

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You should also:

- cover the carcasses with at least one metre of soil
- where necessary, direct surface run-off away from the pit
- slightly mound the pit after backfilling.

You may want to install temporary fencing to assist reinstatement of the area.

If left in paddocks, dead stock can be a potential disease risk and could contaminate land and water. Agriculture Victoria provides a guide to disposing of dead stock after bushfires in Agnote AG1264 at www.agriculture.vic.gov.au

Silage/feed wrapping and hay band/twine

To avoid contamination of produce, land and water, silage/feed wrapping and hay band/twine should be managed appropriately.

Silage wrap recycling programs operate throughout Victoria. Any silage wrap that cannot be recycled should be disposed of at your local transfer station or landfill. Contact your WRRG or local council for details of a recycling program near you.

Hay band/twine can be recycled in some regions. If this is not possible in your area, hay band should be reused on the farm or disposed of at your local transfer station or landfill.

A condition of recycling of silage wrap and hay band is that the material is free from excess soil, plant material and other contaminants.

Do not burn silage or hay wrap. Burning these materials will release fumes that are toxic to human health, and chemical residues which could wash into waterways during rainfall.

Treated timber

Treated timber contains toxic chemicals such as arsenic, chromium and copper. It must not be burnt, as the smoke and ash can impact on human health and contaminate soil and waters. Animals that consume residual ash may also be harmed.

Treated timber (CCA pine, creosote hardwoods) should be safely stored and reused for future works on your farm. Where this is not practical, it should be disposed of at a transfer station or landfill.

Tree and plant waste

Tree wastes can be left in place for natural habitation or used as firewood. Stubble can enhance soil structure and reduce erosion due to rainfall.

Burning tree, plant and stubble is an appropriate management practice where impacts are controlled. Air quality may be affected by the smoke and impact on human health. If you plan to burn tree and plant wastes, it is important to consider the following:

- Activities must comply with local laws. Contact your local council for details.
- Check fire restrictions by contacting your local CFA for details.
- You must not add other wastes such as tyres, hay band, silage wrap or domestic waste to the fire.
- The wind direction should be away from neighbours and other sensitive land uses such as homes, schools and towns.
- How wind direction and smoke may impact a highway or road and ensure that possible hazards (visibility) caused by smoke emissions are avoided.
- That the tree and plant material are dry (for efficient burning and less smoke).
- Avoid creating large piles of wood which can pose a fire risk.
- If composting, consider chipping the wood to speed up the process. Do not compost diseased wood as it may disrupt pathogens in the composting process.

The following areas should not be used for burning:

- where there is a possibility of any off-site impacts, including contamination of groundwater
- where the watertable is close to the surface
- within 100 metres of any surface waters
- areas that regularly drain into a natural water course or drainage line
- gullies or depressions and areas subject to flooding
- lagoons, wetlands, or old watercourses.

Recyclables

Deposit recyclables such as aluminium, glass and paper at your council's recycling depot, local recycling contractor or at the community recycling facility.

Household wastes

Kitchen scraps can be composted. Other household wastes should be disposed of via the services of a waste management contractor, or at the local landfill or waste transfer station.

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Sustainability Victoria's free 'Detox Your Home' household chemical collection service accepts a range of domestic materials, including gas cylinders, batteries and fluorescent tubes, as well as a range of chemicals such as acids and oil paints. See www.sustainability.vic.gov.au for information on the 'Detox Your Home' service.

What are farmers' legal responsibilities?

The inappropriate disposal of farm wastes may be an offence under the *Environment Protection Act 1970*, or contravene a local municipal law.

This publication has been produced as a guide for the management of wastes on your farm. It does not provide an exhaustive list of waste types and management options available. If you are unsure about the appropriate management options for your wastes, contact your local council or EPA office for more information.



Before: Inappropriate waste disposal on a farm which poses a risk to stock, people and the environment.



After: Cleared area ready for revegetation.

Further information

Environment Protection Authority Victoria:

1300 372 842 (1300 EPA VIC)

www.epa.vic.gov.au/business-and-industry/guidelines/agricultural-guidance

Useful internet sites

Agriculture Victoria

www.agriculture.vic.gov.au

Planet Ark's Recycling Near You website

www.recyclingnearyou.com.au

To find your local council's website, go to the website of the Municipal Association of Victoria.

www.mav.asn.au/vic-councils/find-your-council

Recycling and disposal services

Sustainability Victoria: 1300 363 744

www.sustainability.vic.gov.au