

Texas Dairy Matters

Higher Education Supporting the Industry

Managing Retention Control Structures during Catastrophic Events

Ellen R. Jordan, Ph.D. and Todd Bilby, Ph.D.

Extension Dairy Specialists

Department of Animal Science

Texas AgriLife Extension Service

The Texas A&M University System

Permitted confined animal feeding operations (CAFO) are required to inspect their retention control structures (RCS) on a weekly basis. When catastrophic weather events such as hurricanes occur, conduct inspections as soon as it is safe to do so. Using the pond markers, note the depth of the water in the RCS.

Following a catastrophic weather event, if the pond level has risen and the storage volume required for a design rainfall event no longer exists, document what happened. Include the on-farm rainfall amounts as well as the date and time the event began and ended. Once soil moisture decreases, so that runoff won't occur, start irrigating to lower the pond level.

If a discharge occurs, record the date, time, and volume of discharge. Take a sample of the discharge and have it analyzed at a certified laboratory. Record a description of the path the discharge took to get to any waterway or water body. Document what was done to stop the discharge. Keep a timeline of all actions. Notify the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) regional office (Find contact information for the regional offices you online at: www.tceq.state.tx.us/goto/region) of the discharge within 24 hours and send the TCEQ Office of Compliance and Enforcement, Enforcement Division written notification within 14 working days. Once the initial crisis is over, develop a plan to reduce,



eliminate, and prevent any future discharge.

If because of a catastrophic rainfall or other catastrophic event it appears the RCS will overflow, irrigate enough of the wastewater onto designated fields to prevent the overflow. Again, call the regional TCEQ office within 24 hours of beginning the irrigation and send the TCEQ Office of Compliance and Enforcement, Enforcement Division written notification within 14 working days.

After a major storm, check the fences around the RCS. Note any damage and make repairs within 30 days. Take steps to keep animals off the embankment while waiting for repairs. Check both inside and outside embankment walls for erosion that may have resulted from storm damage. Create a written record of your inspections and corrective steps. Contact an engineer to inspect the RCS and obtain repair suggestions.

Although protecting human and animal life is the first priority in catastrophic events, when the storm has passed CAFO owners must also protect the environment.