

Is your farm winter ready?

Planning



Storage



Drainage



Maintenance



Frequently Asked Questions about the Environment Agency's Winter Ready Campaign

What is the Environment Agency's Winter Ready campaign?

The Environment Agency's (EA) Winter Ready campaign will support farmers across the country facing slurry and manure storage and management issues.

We are encouraging farmers to start their preparations now, and to contact us for advice if necessary. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your local Environment Agency Officer or call the National Customer Contact Centre on 03708 506 506.

Why is the Environment Agency running a Winter Ready campaign?

The Environment Agency's Winter Ready campaign aims to help farmers ensure that they have adequate manure and slurry storage which complies with all legal requirements. It will promote good nutrient management which can improve soil fertility, reduce the need for chemical fertilisers, and prevent potential fines and costs associated with non-compliance.

Poorly stored or spread manure can cause pollution. They can lead to nutrient runoff, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, which can contaminate groundwater and surface water, leading to algal blooms and fish kills.

The Environment Agency responds to around 700 agricultural pollution incidents each year, with around 50 classified as serious Category 1 or 2 events. Agricultural pollution is a factor in approximately 40% of water bodies failing to meet water quality standards. One of the main causes of agricultural pollution incidents is the inappropriate and inadequate storage and spreading of organic manures, slurry, and other liquid wastes to land.

Every autumn and winter, we receive multiple incident reports of inappropriate spreading of manure, slurry, anaerobic digestate and other wastes. We also regularly observe this ourselves whilst carrying out our routine duties. This practice is commonly carried out by farmers who have inadequate slurry and manure storage capacity. It also occurs when farmers have agreed contracts to spread organic manures such as anaerobic digestate, septic tank contents or other liquid wastes.

When is the Winter Ready campaign taking place?

The Winter Ready campaign runs from summer through to the end of 2024.

How will the Winter Ready campaign be run?

The campaign begins with an engagement campaign to raise awareness of this issue and prompt farmers, contractors and suppliers of organic manures to prepare for the winter.

During autumn and winter our staff will be carrying out checks on inappropriate organic manure spreading practices. We plan to carry out most of these checks during November or December, depending on weather conditions. If we find farmers or contractors spreading inappropriately,

we will contact them to arrange a full infrastructure inspection to help identify problems that led to the spreading. We will take appropriate enforcement action where necessary

We are working with the NAAC to raise awareness of the issues for contractors and have notified all members of the Biowaste Regulatory Forum, who have largely welcomed the campaign

Where will the Winter Ready campaign focus?

Each area will target areas based on local knowledge and priorities using data based on local water quality issues, knowledge of local farming practices and remote imagery.

Who needs to know about the Winter Ready campaign?

Any farmer or land manager who stores or spreads organic manure may benefit from knowing about and following the advice included in the Environment Agency's Winter Ready campaign. The campaign is particularly relevant to livestock farms who produce, store or spread slurry, including those who import slurry or other liquid manures and wastes on to their farms.

Why can spreading manure over winter be a problem?

Spreading manure during winter can result in nutrient leaching, runoff into water bodies, and soil compaction, which can harm the environment and reduce soil health.

Inappropriate manure and slurry spreading may result in:

- Pollution entering surface waters from runoff of manure and slurry applied to wet and waterlogged land.
- Runoff of slurry applied to frozen and snow-covered land.
- No crop uptake of the nutrients contained in organic manures, leading to nutrients leaching into surface and groundwaters, which, in turn, can cause nutrient pollution and algal enrichment.
- Compaction of soils caused by heavy machinery whilst spreading, which exacerbates runoff because the soil cannot absorb the liquid or nutrients. This in turn can cause soil loss, leading to fine sediment pollution, as well as erosion of soils.
- Compaction can restrict plant development and root growth, affecting yields.
- Inappropriate or careless use of umbilical systems causing runoff or, in some cases, point-source discharges.

What are the regulations regarding manure storage?

Organic manures should be stored in properly designed facilities that prevent leakage and runoff, with sufficient capacity to hold manure for several months. All solid manure, slurry and liquid manures should be properly contained and directed into a well designed and constructed store, although solid manures can be stored temporarily in the field if the site is suitable. Reasonable precautions must be taken to prevent significant risk of diffuse pollution.

Slurry stores must comply with the Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil Regulations (SSAFO). Further guidance can be found at [Storing silage, slurry and agricultural fuel oil - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) and [Protecting our water, soil and air: A code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers, growers and land managers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk).

The legal minimum amount of slurry storage specified in SSAFO is 4 months. Farmer in NVZs need at least 5 months storage for cattle slurry and at least 6 months storage for pig slurry. The Environment Agency recommends that farmers have at least 6 months slurry storage capacity. Ideally stores should be covered to prevent rainfall falling directly into the store.

[Rules for farmers and land managers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rules-for-farmers-and-land-managers-to-prevent-water-pollution) provides links to government guidance on what you must do when you keep livestock or manage land.

What are the regulations regarding manure spreading in winter?

There are regulations and guidelines that farmers must follow to prevent pollution, including restrictions on winter spreading.

- Under the Farming Rules for Water, spreading must be planned and can only occur when there is a soil and crop need for nutrients. In most cases, there will be no soil or crop need during the autumn and winter months. Guidance can be found at [Rules for farmers and land managers to prevent water pollution - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rules-for-farmers-and-land-managers-to-prevent-water-pollution)
- The Farming Rules for Water also require farmers to take reasonable precautions to prevent significant risk of diffuse pollution when they are spreading organic manures.
- In Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (55% of the country), spreading is restricted between dates in the autumn and winter, to prevent nitrates running off or leaching into the water environment. The dates for the closed period vary according to local soil characteristics and land use. Government guidance can be found at [Nitrate vulnerable zones - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nitrate-vulnerable-zones).
- Organic manures must not be spread on waterlogged, flooded, snow covered or frozen soil.
- Buffer zones alongside watercourses and around wells, springs and boreholes must be observed.
- Allowing slurry or other polluting matter to enter inland freshwaters (e.g. rivers, streams and ditches) will cause pollution and is an offence under the Environmental Permitting Regulations.

What do I need to do to be Winter Ready?

Slurry Storage

The main cause of most of the inappropriate spreading is lack of adequate slurry storage. Assessing the impact of rainfall on slurry storage and what are the first, and often most straightforward, steps you can take. Other steps include:

- Check and ensure you have adequate slurry storage.
- Measure rainfall accurately to help with your slurry storage calculations
- Consider roofing over slurry and manure stores.
- Do not take liquid wastes or other manures onto farm unless you can safely store these until it is appropriate to spread.

Prepare a contingency plan, allowing for the fact that we are experiencing wetter winters, and you may need to store more manure and slurry for longer periods of time.

The Farming Investment Fund (FIF) Slurry Infrastructure Grant may be available to help farmers upgrade their slurry storage facilities. Farming Investment Fund (FIF) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Plan your spreading

- Make sure that you apply organic manures in accordance with a nutrient management plan. You must be able to show that all your applications have been properly planned for the crops you are growing.
- Only spread when there is a soil and crop need. Slurry and manures are a valuable source of nutrients – don't waste them.
- Do not spread during NVZ closed periods.
- Be prepared to postpone your planned applications if the conditions are not right on the day.
- Do not spread if heavy rain is forecast.
- Maintain buffer zones near water bodies, wells, springs and boreholes. (No applications of manufactured fertiliser within 2m; No applications of organic manures within 10m of surface waters; No application of organic manures with 50m of spring wells, or boreholes)
- Prepare a risk map showing the slope of your land, proximity to water, soil type and land drains to help you plan the most appropriate places to spread your organic manures.
- You may wish to consult a FACTS qualified agronomist to help with your planning
- Make sure your staff and any [contractors](#) who are responsible for spreading understand what they can and can't do, where they can spread and what to do if something does go wrong.
- Download the [Muck Matters](#) leaflet, produced by the NAAC and Environment Agency.

Farmyard Drainage

- Mark and understand where drains go.
- Rainfall from roofs and clean yards should be kept separate from manure systems unless you need extra dilution for slurry handling and storage. Consider whether you can collect and re-use the clean water.
- Measure yard and roofed areas and use [Magic Map Application \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://defra.gov.uk) to help calculate winter and annual volumes of rainwater.
- Reorganise yards and drains to reduce the amount of fouled water and slurry that needs to be managed.
- Keep areas of open concrete used by livestock to the minimum, as these areas will be fouled by manure.
- Pipe or channel foul runoff rather than letting it flow across clean yards.
- Consider roofing over outside soiled yard areas to keep rainfall out of slurry stores.

Maintenance

- Inspect storage tanks, manure and slurry stores for signs of corrosion or leakage. Use binoculars for inaccessible areas.
- Check for broken gutters, downspouts and other rainwater goods.
- Check all foul drains, channels, pipes, valves and sluices frequently to ensure they are flowing in the right direction, operating well and coping with the amount of rainfall.
- Repair infrastructure as necessary and get professional help if required.

What about organic materials that come from off-farm?

Farmers and businesses receiving materials to be spread on their land have a duty to ensure that the materials they are accepting meet the necessary legal requirements. Additional guidance, including a checklist about using waste and recycled materials on farm is available in:

- [Landspreading to improve soil health.](#)
- [Know what's going on your land - a checklist for landspreading waste](#)
- [Waste volumes and types – what can you spread.](#)

Simple steps you can take include:

- Making sure that you include any organic manures that you import from off your farm are included in your nutrient management, risk and contingency planning.
- Ensure that your supplier gives you details of the nutrient content of the materials so that you can plan and use them properly.
- If you allow suppliers to spread their materials directly onto your land, ensure that they are doing this in accordance with your planned soil and crop needs.
- If you use contractors to spread materials on your land, make sure that they have copies of your risk maps and that they adhere to them
- If you do not have an immediate soil and crop need for these materials, make sure you can store them safely before they are spread.
- Any organic manures stored on agricultural land must be a minimum of 10 metres from inland freshwaters or coastal waters, and 50 metres from a spring, well or borehole.
- They must not be stored anywhere where there would be a significant risk of agricultural diffuse pollution.
- Only put solid manures into temporary field heaps if there is minimal risk of run-off polluting groundwater or surface water.
- Field heaps should be located well away from any ruts or tracks that could provide a pathway for effluent to get into ditches, surface waters or damage habitats.
- Using narrow densely packed A-shaped heaps will shed rainwater more easily and prevent manure from becoming very wet.
- Consider whether you should take organic material from off farm sources at all.

What financial assistance is available for farmers to improve manure storage and management?

There are various grants, subsidies, and financial incentives available to help farmers invest in better manure management infrastructure and practices.

As part of the Farming Investment Fund, which aims to improve productivity and profitability, the environment and animal health and welfare, Defra has offered a Slurry Infrastructure Grant which is designed to help farmers improve or expand slurry storage capacity and improve the use of organic nutrients on their farm.

Other support includes a range of capital items available through Countryside Stewardship Capital Grants that can support farmers to reduce the amount of slurry generated on their farm. This includes slurry store covers, roofing, concrete yards and drainage systems. A Catchment Sensitive Farming advisor can visit farms and provide advice on how these can best be utilised.

Guidance on funding for farmers, growers and land managers can be found at [Funding for farmers, growers and land managers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-farmers-growers-and-land-managers).

You can use the [Countryside Stewardship grant finder - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-stewardship-grant-finder) to search for items that you may be able to claim for, for example [RP16: Rainwater goods - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rp16-rainwater-goods) and [RP28: Roofing \(sprayer washdown area, manure storage area, livestock gathering area, slurry stores, silage stores\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rp28-roofing-sprayer-washdown-area-manure-storage-area-livestock-gathering-area-slurry-stores-silage-stores)

Where can I find tips, tools and advice on slurry storage to help reduce costs, add value and protect the environment?

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board website provides information will help you ensure that the slurry store on your farm is practical, safe, and legally compliant. Key points to consider include:

- How much storage do you require?
- Have you taken action to reduce the amount of slurry you produce?
- Do you have the necessary permissions?

More information can be found at [Slurry storage | AHDB](https://www.ahdb.co.uk/slurry-storage)

How do I calculate the quantity of slurry that I need to store?

AHDB's Slurry wizard enables you to work out your slurry storage requirements and explore different storage scenarios to comply with regulations. It includes recently updated rainfall data, or you can use your own if you have it. Slurry Wizard is most suitable for dairy farmers [Slurry wizard | AHDB](https://www.ahdb.co.uk/slurry-wizard)

Can I store slurry in a temporary slurry store while a permanent, legally compliant store is being planned and constructed?

It may be possible to store slurry temporarily in slurry bags, net silos or other temporary structures while a new storage facility is being planned or constructed. Environment Agency Area officers may agree to temporary solutions for a limited period, provided they do not pose a significant risk of pollution. This approach can be a reasonable and practical measure to manage a greater risk of pollution as a farm develops improved, legal storage systems.

[Factsheet 4 slurry bags, lined wire mesh and corrugated panel stores Feb 2023.pdf \(projectblue.blob.core.windows.net\)](https://www.projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/factsheet-4-slurry-bags-lined-wire-mesh-and-corrugated-panel-stores-feb-2023.pdf) provides further information.

Are "winter ready" and "exceptional circumstances" the same?

No. "Winter ready" refers to being prepared to manage manure and slurry during typical winter weather conditions that can be anticipated and planned for. On the other hand, "exceptional circumstances" refer to unusual, uncommon, or unpredictable events that cannot be reasonably planned for. A wetter-than-average winter, for example, is not considered an exceptional circumstance.

Advice in exceptional circumstances can found at [Preventing agricultural pollution in exceptional circumstances - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preventing-agricultural-pollution-in-exceptional-circumstances). This includes a hierarchy of options that may help with winter ready contingency planning.

Can good manure management have economic benefits?

Yes, proper management can improve soil fertility, reduce the need for chemical fertilisers, and prevent potential fines and legal costs associated with non-compliance.

What should I do if I have concerns, cannot spread properly, or have an emergency?

Contact the EA if you know you have a problem, so we can work with you to mitigate risk of pollution until a permanent solution is reached. The Environment Agency would try to provide advice and guidance, if appropriate, before taking further enforcement action, so you can be confident the Environment Agency will try to help you. Call us on 03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm) or email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

If pollution occurs, you should report it. Call the Environment Agency incident hotline.
Telephone: 0800 80 70 60