

**Onondaga County Council on Environmental Health
Manure Spreading Issues Evaluation
June 2014**

INTRODUCTION

The Onondaga County Council on Environmental Health (CEH) has studied manure spreading runoff incidents which have occurred in Onondaga County, the responses to those events, and descriptions of CAFOs and their associated regulatory and management guidelines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In case of a manure runoff event, there should be a single, standard reporting mechanism so all three parties, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD and the Onondaga County Department of Health (OCDOH) receive the same information. Contact names and phone numbers, including for off- hours, need to be exchanged. At the County level, this would be the SWCD District Manager and Director of Environmental Health.
2. The Onondaga County's Agricultural 911 system created by the SWCD provides immediate assistance and its agricultural spill protocol serves as a model that should be copied by other counties. Farmers are provided with a checklist of actions and contacts in the event of a manure spill or accident. Since there is frequent turnover in the names of municipal officials, the checklist should include the phone number for the offices of the town supervisor, highway superintendent, and/or codes enforcement person (SWCD).
3. Information exchange takes place among SWCDs at New York Conservation District and the New York Issues Group (agricultural industry and agency representation) meetings. Communication should be continued and enhanced concerning manure runoff events. A database including pertinent information on previous manure runoff events such as the date, time, location, probable cause(s), and the waterbodies, property, and homes impacted during each event should be maintained by the NYSDEC and readily accessible to the SWCD and County Health Department.
4. Assessments of current and potential manure storage capacity needs along with labor, technology, and management capabilities for manure handling are completed during SWCD Tier V assessments (i.e., evaluations of overall farm operations and management.) Staffing and budgetary restraints limit the number of Tier V assessments conducted annually. Phone surveys of priority area farms could be used to expand the above information base. (SWCD)

RECOMMENDATIONS (Cont.)

5. While it would be advantageous to provide information to all County residents on private well supplies, that effort is too large in scope and needs to be prioritized at least initially. To provide a one-time baseline, available information on agricultural activity as well as from county databases, GIS maps, and aerial photography would be used to provide a focus on rural residences with private drinking water supplies that may be in close proximity to fields where manure spreading has recently taken place or may be done in the future. This information is intended solely for respective agency use. . (SWCD, SOCPA, OCDOH).
6. Provide identified residences from the mapping and data analysis above with public awareness information on subjects such as: i) water quality testing parameters/frequency of testing, ii) why such testing is important, iii) why residents need to have knowledge of their well's construction and possible vulnerabilities, and iv) emergency contact information. Residents having water quality testing done would be encouraged to voluntarily provide the results and any other information on their wells to the County Health Department to help establish baseline water quality and well conditions (SWCD,OCDOH).
7. Although being done on a state or regional basis, workshops or similar instructional opportunities for County farmers and their employees could be given by the SWCD to help ensure proper manure spreading best management practices are being implemented. Although the issue is not specific to the Skaneateles Lake watershed, thought might be given by the Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program Review Committee (WAPRC) to having this as a main discussion topic for the annual SLWAP meeting program and invite all area farmers. Among the topics emphasized should be manure management on public highways near field access and exit points.
8. A tour focused on land management and manure spreading at selected County farm(s) could serve as a good public relations and educational awareness mechanism for the public to address their questions one-on-one with the farmer. Efforts should be taken by all concerned parties (e.g. SWCD, CEH, lake/watershed associations, other pertinent citizen organizations, municipalities) to increase attendance to such an event on the part of the target population.

DISCUSSION

Our study shows that:

- At the local level, the three entities most directly involved in the response to a manure runoff event are: the NYSDEC, Onondaga County SWCD and the Onondaga County Health Department (Environmental Health). The Council's understanding is there are presently two possible communication avenues depending upon whether or not the NYSDEC first response is a Conservation Officer.
- The causes of manure runoff events are varied and may involve an unusual set of circumstances. However, whatever the causes, they need to be better understood in order to develop policies and procedures to prevent or reduce future occurrences.
- A primary concern if a manure runoff event take place is the potential impact to drinking water supplies; most notably private wells. Fortunately, the area of the County where manure spreading is done and in close proximity to residents relying upon private drinking water supplies is thought to be limited. It is believed existing information is available to complete a "vulnerability analysis" to help target areas where preventive measures and management options can be focused.
- The County Health Department has no regulatory jurisdiction over private wells or other residential drinking water supply sources. However, in cooperation with the NYSDOH, initial testing and guidance is provided in the event of contamination such as experienced this and last spring.
- While action can be taken at the local level, the topic of manure spreading and associated issues are complex and need to be discussed fully at the state and perhaps federal level.