



# ALREADY AT FREEBOARD?

How to Deal with a  
Manure Storage Emergency

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Does the wet spring have your manure storage looking dangerously full? Are your fields too saturated to spread on? There are some actions you can take to relieve the situation and the impending environmental emergency.

Do everything you can to reduce liquid manure storage before they are dangerously close to overflowing, see "[Managing manure storage structures](#)". Even relieving a few inches off the top will buy some time and reduce stress on the storage system. Options may include hauling to the driest field you have or assessing if you can get on any alfalfa field without getting stuck, perhaps transferring manure to another system is the best choice.

## Haul to your driest field or a field with perennial crop

Take a look at your farm and haul to a sandy field or a field with the best carrying capacity to carry the load of the equipment. You can choose lighter equipment by using a drag hose rather than a tanker. A custom operator may have this equipment. You could choose to spread on a perennial crop like grass or alfalfa hay. Liquid manure is best on hay fields because it is less likely to smother the crop. There is a significant possibility you will damage your hay stand. Remember anytime you are on wet fields you will be causing compaction, so you will have to deal with that in the future on any field you apply on that is wet.

## Transferring manure to another system

Does your neighbor have a storage that can take some of your manure? In this situation look for a storage that is well built and designed. If it is possible, go with your neighbor to the local NRCS office to see the engineered drawings. They can tell you if the storage was designed to adequately handle the load. If you choose this option, then you will want to consider a written agreement with your neighbor detailing who is going to empty the pit and who owns the manure. For CAFOs, permitted farms, there are rules with [DEQ](#) about manifesting manure and application standard.

If you don't have the option of another manure storage and your land isn't suitable, maybe a neighbor's land is. Do they have a field that is sandier and drier? Again, you will want to get an agreement. Detail how much manure is being spread, the rate, the setbacks you will observe, and who owns the manure. Review the neighbor's nutrient management plan with them and

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**To contact an expert in your area, visit [msue.anr.msu.edu/experts](https://msue.anr.msu.edu/experts) or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)**

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follow it. You will also want to know if there are certain neighbors that will get upset if manure is spread too close to their homes.

Don't make a bad situation worse. When land applied, be sure that the manure is not at risk of running off to surface waters. Tile drained fields provide another risk during wet times. Be cautious by taking appropriate steps to insure applied manure does not reach surface inlets or tile drains. Use tile stops and drainage control. Observe tile outlets for discharge 24 hours before and after application for discharge. Review the article [“Don't let valuable manure do down the drain”](#) for more information on tile drains and manure application

For permitted farms, allowing manure to exceed the freeboard limit is a permit violation, even if a release does not occur. Contact your regional Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Staff and file a report. They will work with you to seek an emergency solution.

In the event that a manure storage breaches and manure reaches surface waters, contact the Pollution Emergency Alerting System hotline immediately at the Department of Environmental Quality: (800) 292.4706 or Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development: (800) 405.0101

## Plan for Emergencies

Each farm location has unique risks of manure reaching surface waters. Assess your risk, consider what the worst case scenario might be and think through a plan to address that situation. Knowing the down slope direction from the storage will help you think through what sensitive areas are along that path and help you know how critical the risks could be. Know how to get earth moving equipment on site immediately and plan where potential berms would need to be built to divert the flow from reaching surface water, neighboring property or road ways. Even when there are not imminent risks to surface waters, have plans in place to contain, control and stop manure from moving overland. If your farm doesn't have a written plan, you can learn how to do one with [MSU Extension](#) bulletin E-2575s, [Emergency Planning for the Farm: Livestock Operations](#).

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