

Responding to Odor Complaints

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One of the most important pieces of an Odor Management Plan (OMP) is how the farm will respond to complaints. This is a critical issue from three perspectives. First, it is sometimes difficult to separate serious odor complaints resulting from excessive odor emissions for complaints registered by disgruntled neighbors during non-odorous events. Second, it is difficult to determine how many valid complaints are needed to trigger the implementation of an odor control technology or a major review of your OMP. And third, there must be some method for monitoring the effectiveness of an odor control technology. The complaint response protocol will set up an OMP and set guidelines for an acceptable number of odor events and some method to evaluate the effectiveness of odor control practices. For this, it is critical to foster and maintain a good relationship with neighbors and other community members.

Avoid Odor Complaints

Avoid odor complaints by making an effort to control odor emissions, including peak odor events such as manure agitation or land application of concentrated manure. These efforts and their perceived effect on odors should be documented.

Establish a Relationship with Neighbors and Community Leaders

An effective complaint response plan requires the input of neighbors and community leaders such as environmental service specialists, regulatory agencies, and county commissioners. These individuals provide an honest evaluation of farm odor impacts. They could be listed on the OMP and help in the development of the complaint response plan. A team approach fosters communication and a flow of information which is critical to responding to complaints.

Monitor Odor Events

Monitoring odor events will help verify odor complaints and identify odor sources. Monitoring might include scheduled drives around the farm perimeter with a notebook recording the date, time, and location of monitoring and recording the relative strength of odors detected. Other monitoring might include record keeping of odor events by neighbors. The strength of odors can be recorded on a three point intensity scale, where 1 = detectable odors, 2 = recognizable odors, and 3 = very distinct and annoying odors.

Set Acceptable Intensity and Frequency Limits

Since odors are a part of all dairy, livestock and poultry operations, it is impossible to expect 100% odor free air around the farm. However, frequent odor events of high intensity are unacceptable. Therefore, some reasonable frequency of odor events should be established. This frequency could include a given number of odor events per month or per year that are acceptable. Above this frequency, the OMP would be implemented. Establishing the acceptable frequency and intensity (how often and how strong) of odor

events should be done with input from your neighbors and community leaders so everyone is familiar with the goals of the farm.

Evaluate Odor Control Practices

After an odor control practice has been implemented, an honest evaluation of its effectiveness is needed. A complaint response plan should outline the evaluation methods and techniques. This evaluation should consist of a mixture of laboratory analysis, field odor assessments and relative odor evaluations as described above.

Your OMP should describe how the public will be involved in the process. Dairies should keep the public aware of actions underway and how the process is going (ex. phone contact, small public meetings, newsletters, newspaper interviews, etc). These actions are at the discretion of the producer. Remember that if the public isn't impacted by the changes in odor; then, why develop an OMP?