

Muck Matters

Good practice advice for agricultural contractors



Environment
Agency

Pollution incidents affect the quality of our rivers. The most common cause of these incidents in the agricultural contracting sector is from burst umbilical pipes.

As an agricultural contractor, following these good practice guidelines will help you and those you are working for to comply with the law and prevent pollution.

Before you start

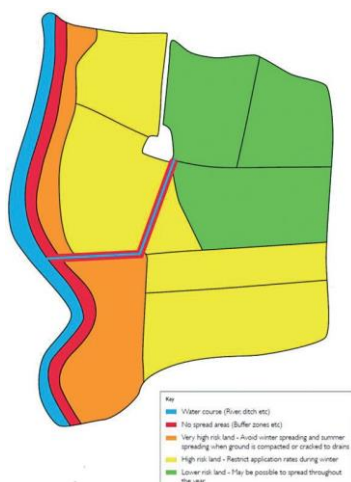
Don't start the task until you are properly prepared and briefed by the farmer.

The farmer should provide:

- A copy of the **risk map** for the farm which identifies high/low risk and sensitive areas of the farm.
- Evidence of a **nutrient management plan**. The farmer should regularly test manure and soil to calculate suitable application rates and plan timing.

You need to:

- Keep **records** of spreading and share them with the farmer.
- Make sure you have identified any pollution risks. Have an **emergency contingency plan** and check the weather forecast.
- Ensure all sluice gates and pumps have been **maintained** and are in good working order. Know how to operate and maintain the equipment you will be using.
- Ensure that your staff are **trained** to operate all equipment from sluices gates to applicators.
- Consider having a **written agreement** between parties, to confirm responsibilities.



Example of a simple manure spreading risk map.
EA Photo

Don't spread slurry in a hurry!

Land Managers must comply with the Farming Rules for Water (FRFW) when spreading.

Contractors need to be aware:

Organic manures and manufactured fertilisers must not be applied if the soil is waterlogged, snow-covered or frozen.

Organic manures must not be applied within **10 metres** of a watercourse and **50 metres** of a spring, well or borehole.

Organic manures must not be spread if there is a significant risk of causing pollution, such as on steep gradients.

Manufactured fertiliser must not be applied within **2 metres** of a watercourse.

When possible use more precise application techniques such as dribble bars/injectors.

Avoid spilling slurry or digestate while you are filling and moving equipment around the farm.

Splash plates are likely to be banned from 2025.



Never spread slurry on snow. Photo: EA

Spreading slurry and digestate using low emissions spreading equipment (trailing hose, trailing shoe or injection) rather than surface broadcast (splash plates) which lose valuable nitrogen via ammonia to the atmosphere.

A Land Manager must:

Ensure organic manure spreading complies with agricultural best practice and does not cause pollution.

[Best Farming Practices.pdf \(everysite.co.uk\)](https://www.everysite.co.uk/best-farming-practices.pdf)

Only spread when and where there is a soil and crop need as identified in the farm Nutrient Management Plan.

Slurry spread *within* 10m of the watercourse. Photo: EA



Keep equipment in good order

Burst umbilical pipes are the most common cause of pollution

Ensure all machinery - including umbilical pipes, is regularly cleaned and maintained.

Check all equipment is in good working order prior to use.

Walk the line, frequently checking all umbilical joints and pipes both before, during and after use.

Use safety cut off to stop delivery if there is a problem.

Take care when repositioning umbilical pipes so that slurry does not run off into ditches.

Consider using higher grade pipework when near sensitive features such as watercourses/culverts.

Use newer sections of piping at the start and end of the line as they receive the most wear. Take care to ensure pipework is not damaged on hard ground when installing.

Regulatory Considerations

In Nitrate Vulnerable Zones you must comply with the rules that restrict the quantity of livestock manure and organic manures you can apply for crop requirement and at certain times of the year.

[Nitrate vulnerable zones - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/nitrate-vulnerable-zones)

You must also comply with the Farming Rules for Water, particularly for autumn and winter applications of organic manures.

[Applying the farming rules for water - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/apply-the-farming-rules-for-water)

A Code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers, growers and land managers offers practical interpretation of legislation and provides good advice on best practice.

[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/guidance/protecting-our-water-soil-and-air-a-code-of-good-agricultural-practice-for-farmers-growers-and-land-managers)



Never jet slurry over a hedge. Photo: EA

Reporting pollution incidents:

The earlier we know, the better

Use the Environment Agency's 24-hour hotline:

0800 80 70 60



When spreading slurry and liquid waste to land there is a shared responsibility. You should be aware that both land managers and contractors have responsibility to ensure pollution is not caused.

Digestate spreading using a spreader bar. Photo: Eden Rivers Trust

**For further information, contact the
Environment Agency on 03708 506 506**



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