

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

Q: Who runs the CAFO permit program?

A: The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) runs the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permit program as the delegated Clean Water Act authority in Washington. It retains permitting and enforcement authority for CAFOs. The Department of Agriculture runs the Dairy Nutrient Management Program in Washington and provides inspection and complaint response services for Ecology on CAFOs as agreed to in a joint Memorandum of Agreement.

Q: What is an Animal Feeding Operation (AFO)?

A: An AFO is a facility that confines livestock for 45 days or more in any 12 month period in a place where there are no forage or crop residues. Based on the federal definition, AFOs may be small, medium, or large depending on the number of animals housed at the facility.



Q: What is a CAFO?

A: A CAFO is a type of AFO. Federal rules define what a CAFO is in a tiered fashion. A large AFO is automatically a large CAFO. A medium AFO becomes a medium CAFO when it has a discharge. A small AFO becomes a small CAFO when Ecology designates it to be a CAFO based on the finding that it is a significant contributor of pollutants.

Q: What CAFOs are required to have a discharge permit?

A: Any CAFO that discharges to waters of the state of Washington is required to have a permit from Ecology. Discharges requiring a permit may be from the production area or land application areas. Currently there are 12 permitted CAFOs in Washington.

Q: What is the status of Ecology's CAFO general permit?

A: Ecology issued the most current CAFO general permit in July 2006. This permit expired in July 2011 and Ecology is working on a replacement general permit.

Q: What is the status of the replacement CAFO general permit?

A: Ecology is working to develop a replacement permit that is both legally and technically sound. The permit Ecology develops must meet requirements of state and federal laws and rules and take recent court cases into account. In addition, Ecology must balance the various beneficial uses of state waters and the economic impact to the livestock industry.

Q: What federal requirements must the replacement CAFO permit address?

A: Federal rule requires that Ecology develop permit and technical standards that address: manure storage (for example, lagoons); mortality management; diversion of clean water; preventing direct animal contact with water; conservation practices to control nutrient loss; manure export/transfer; protocols for manure/soil sampling and testing; protocols for the land application of manure; and recordkeeping and reporting.

Additional considerations that must be addressed in the permit for the protection of water quality include manure storage maintenance, lagoon closure, and groundwater pollution.

Q: What is the public process for draft permits?

A: The public process for draft permits includes publication of a notice in the State Register and notification of interested parties. There will be a public comment period of at least 30 days, during which Ecology will accept comments on the draft permit. Ecology will also hold at least one public hearing about the draft permit, during which oral comments are accepted. Ecology will respond to all substantive comments received in a document called the Response to Comments. Then, Ecology will issue the final CAFO General Permit.

Q: Where can I get more information about the draft replacement CAFO permit as Ecology moves forward?

A: Information and draft documents will be posted on Ecology's website when they become available for public review and comment. The documents will be available at: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/permits/cafo/index.html. Ecology is maintaining an interested parties list. Contact Jon Jennings to be included on this list.

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