

An Environmental Risk Screening Tool for Confined Feeding Operations in Alberta

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The purpose of the Agricultural Operation Practices Act (AOPA) and its regulations is to ensure that the province's livestock industry can grow to meet the opportunities presented by local and world markets in an environmentally sustainable manner. AOPA and its regulations can be prescriptive in some areas, giving the regulator and operator little flexibility. Other parts of the legislation provide more flexibility to evaluate and oversee management of potential environmental risks.

The Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB), in consultation with stakeholders, finalized the Environmental Risk Screening Tool for Manure Facilities at Confined Feeding Operations in March 2008. The tool formalizes the process in which the NRCB assesses environmental risk at confined feeding operations and ensures that NRCB decisions regarding risk are science based, transparent and consistent.

The risk screening tool allows the NRCB to assess environmental risk for both surface water and groundwater. In order to screen risk at facilities in a consistent manner, a number of evaluation factors are used in the hazard potential and pathways sections of the tool. To the extent possible, the factors were made consistent with technical specifications in AOPA. A numeric value is assigned to each factor that reflects the level of risk. Total hazard potential scores are added to the groundwater and surface water pathway scores separately to assess the exposure potential. The exposure potential, considered separately for groundwater and surface water, is used to score facilities as low, medium or high potential risk to the environment. The risk screening tool underwent extensive desktop and field testing.

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