

About the Guide and Approvals

This EPA Guide covers design and operation considerations for offal pits or trenches for the burial of solid abattoir waste. Slaughter waste includes viscera, paunch, skin, bone, hair, feathers, fish frames and heads, congealed blood, and trimmings of a hide or the viscera and trimmings of a butchered animal removed during dressing. It does not include liquid wastes generated during slaughtering.

This Guide is for operators of commercial abattoirs but may also be useful to individuals who slaughter their own meat, game hunters and others who dispose of meat waste from time to time. The Guide is not intended to cover veterinary waste, carcass disposal for sick and old animals, or mass mortalities caused by fire, flood, disease or disease containment actions, poisoning or other events.

Historically, burial of slaughter wastes in pits or trenches was a common practice, providing a cheap and convenient means of disposal, especially for operators of smaller abattoirs. However, burying this waste can give rise to ground or surface water contamination, nuisance odour, biosecurity, animal health and vermin risks. Burying of slaughter waste is therefore now considered a 'last resort' option that may only occur when no alternative that better manages risks or meets waste hierarchy principles, is available. It must be demonstrated that environmental harm or nuisance will not occur. Preferred options for slaughter waste disposal include approved rendering, composting or landfill facilities.

Slaughter waste is classified as a controlled waste in Tasmania (Waste Category Code: K100 – Animal effluent and residues). Approval to dispose of controlled waste is required under Regulation 6(1)(a) of the Environmental Management and Pollution Control (Waste Management) Regulations 2020. Approval must be sought from the EPA or local Planning Authority before establishing a slaughter waste burial pit or trench. The pit should be designed and operated in a way that enables complete rehabilitation within several years.

Home kill for personal use is regulated under the Primary Produce Safety (Meat and Poultry) Regulations 2014 and does not require approval for waste (solid or liquid) disposal however must still be managed so as not to cause environmental harm or nuisance. The home kill exemption only applies where the animal resides and is slaughtered for consumption on the premises and the meat is not to leave the property.

Site selection

Prior to granting approval the EPA or Planning Authority will conduct an assessment of the proposed burial location, taking into consideration geology, soil type, depth to groundwater, groundwater flow, slope of ground, location in relation to minimum buffer distances, site access and security, land owner consent, operational details for burial or trenching, fencing to prevent stock or wildlife access, odour and biosecurity management measures.

A site is more likely to be approved for slaughter waste burial if it has the following characteristics:

- Deep clay textured soils
- Groundwater table at seasonal peak is at least 2 metres below bottom of the pit
- Slope less than 10%
- Trenches running generally across the slope
- All weather site access for waste transport vehicles and waste handling equipment
- A lockable gate to prevent unauthorized access
- A location that meets minimum buffer distances (see Table 1).

Pit design

1. The following separation distances are recommended, based on odour nuisance, animal health and environmental leaching risks:

Table 1: Buffer distances for an abattoir slaughter waste pit

Land Use or Feature	Minimum Separation Distance (m)
Meat processing premises	150
Water courses and dams	200
Bores	250
Property boundary	50
Residences and sensitive areas	500

- The pit must be located on a site that has deep, fine textured soils (such as clay) with underlying geology that has low risk for groundwater contamination.
- The pit must be located in an area that is not likely to be subject to flooding.
- The deepest point of the pit must maintain a minimum height of 2 metres above groundwater at seasonal peak level.
- The pit should be no greater than three metres wide which helps create an even spread of slaughter waste material in the pit, as well as a reduced rehabilitation timeframe.
- The pit must be located such that surface run-off draining toward the pit is minimised. Cut off drains must be dug around the pit to prevent surface run-off from entering the pit.
- Stock access to the pit area must be prevented by a stock exclusion fence or other means.
- The pit must be fitted with a removable but ventilated cover to prevent entry of rainwater, surface run-off and vermin.

Pit operation

- Paunches must be cut prior to disposal to prevent explosion risk from gas build up during decomposition.
- All material must be transported to the pit in covered and fully contained, leak proof containers or vehicles.
- If waste is transported to the pit on public roads, transportation must only be undertaken by a Registered Controlled Waste Transporter, registered to transport (K100) controlled waste.
- Use of lime in the pit is not recommended as it may reduce the decomposition rate of the material.
- Green waste, such as straw or sawdust, may be added to the pit to assist decomposition.
- Slaughter waste is not to be placed less than 0.5 metres from the top of the pit. Slaughter waste must not protrude from the pit. The pit must be covered as soon as waste is placed in it.
- A record of the type and amount of waste disposed must be kept and provided to EPA or Council upon request. A site plan must be kept showing areas where offal pits have been established and their status.

Pit closure

- At time of closure the pit must be covered with at least 1 metre of clean fill material of low permeability, such as clay soil.
- Final fill cover must be arranged in a single mound to allow for subsidence over time and to prevent ponding of surface water over the pit site.
- A record and site plan of the pit locations, types and amount of waste disposed must be kept and provided to EPA or Council upon request.