

What to do with dead animals

The current economic downturn has made it difficult for some folks to feed and care for their domestic animals and/or livestock.

Related to that, a controversial bill that would allow horse slaughter houses in Montana currently awaits the signature of Gov. Schweitzer. Regardless of whether the governor signs the bill, disposing of horses and other large animals presents a challenge to citizens of Montana and Ravalli County.

Our office regularly gets calls from people wondering how to safely and legally dispose of dead animals. After making a few phone calls to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the landfill in Missoula and local veterinarians, and after reviewing Montana Code Annotated, we came up with the following guidelines for people who have a dead pet or farm animal to dispose of.

First, let's be clear with what you **cannot** do:

- You can't burn the carcass under any circumstances (except in the rare case of a disease outbreak in which burning is determined to be the best measure to prevent the spread of the disease. In such a case, you would need special permission from the state departments of Environmental Quality and Agriculture.)
- You can't dump or leave the carcass in, upon or within 200 feet of any highway, road, street, alley or public property in Montana.
- You can't dump or leave the carcass on privately owned property where hunting, fishing, or other recreation is permitted, unless it is done so legally and with the consent of the owner.
- You cannot place all or any part of a dead animal in any lake, river, creek, pond, or reservoir.
- You cannot place all or any part of a dead animal within 1 mile of a residence unless it's buried at least 2 feet underground.
- You can't bury the animal in an area of high ground water.

Now, here's what you **can** do:

- You may bury a dead animal at least 2 feet underground on your own property or on private property with the owner's consent, provided the site is not in an area of high ground water.
- You can take any dead animal to the Allied Waste Landfill in Missoula where you will be charged \$33 per large animal (cows, horses, llamas, mules) and the regular rate of \$13.60 per cubic yard for smaller animals (dogs, cats, goats, sheep, etc.). Call the landfill at 728-9572 for more information and directions.
- You can have your pets and other animals cremated at Bitterroot Pet Crematorium at 817 Shoshone Loop, off Skalkaho Highway. They charge from \$75 to \$95 to cremate the animal, depending on the size, and they will pick up the carcass for \$30. Call 363-1650 for information about their services.
- Bitterroot Humane Association on Fairgrounds Road in Hamilton also has a state-approved crematorium. Their prices are comparable to Bitterroot

Pet Crematorium and their proceeds go toward supporting the county's animal shelter.

- Baker Commodities out of Missoula will pick up livestock carcasses on Fridays in Ravalli County. They charge \$100 for a horse and \$50 for a cow, but they can't take cows over 30 months old. They do not take sheep, goats or llamas. They will take pigs for \$50. Call 549-1961 or 360-0404 for more information about their services.
- If you have an agriculture operation of more than five acres, you may legally dispose of your own dead animals as long as the disposal does not create a nuisance or public health hazard or violate the laws governing the disposal of hazardous substances. As mentioned previously, you **cannot** burn the carcass since that would be in violation of the Clean Air Act.

While not specifically addressed by Ravalli County or Montana law, we recommend a few common-sense rules when disposing of dead animals:

- Don't bury or otherwise dispose of animals within 100 feet of a well or surface water, or in areas of high groundwater, including flood-irrigated fields.
- Don't place dead animals where they might attract neighboring dogs.
- Don't place animals where the wind might carry the odor of decomposition to neighbors – such an act would constitute a public nuisance.

In order to help citizens understand more clearly many of the environmental health issues in Ravalli County and the role of the Environmental Health Department in addressing these issues, our department runs a series of newspaper articles titled "Environmental Health Talk."

In this ongoing series we hope to help raise the community's awareness of issues such as air and water quality and give readers useful tips on topics like recycling, collecting and disposing of hazardous materials and maintaining septic systems, just to name a few. To this end, we welcome public comment. If there's an environmental health issue you'd like us to address, write call or email the department: RCEH, c/o "EnviroHealth Talk," 215 South 4th St, Suite D, Hamilton MT 59840. Phone: 375-6571. Email: rdaniel@ravallicounty.mt.gov