

Mass Mortality of CAFO Animals Causes Nightmare for the Neighbors

In our fact sheet on [CAFO cruelty](#) we noted how the intensive confinement of large numbers of animals in enclosed spaces sets up a disaster when there is a power failure. The animals will quickly use up the available oxygen and suffocate, and in the summer, may endure heat stroke. It's called a mass mortality event.

17-minutes from the heart of a Great Lakes city of 40,000 humans, where a large number of hogs were confined in two barns of an animal feeding operation, just such an event was experienced by neighbors, including a member of the CAFO sub-team. It took alert neighbors to notify the state CAFO regulating agency that an unplanned and deadly situation had occurred there.

A week after a 4-day power outage, utility trucks converged on the site of the hog CAFO, easily viewed by the neighbor across the road. Another month passed and a neighbor observed a huge excavation hole dug near the property line. The regulating agency was notified, and they advised that at least one barnful of pigs had died.

Instead of burying the pigs in the huge hole, the CAFO used the dirt from the hole to try to cover the huge pile of pigs in an attempt to compost the bodies. Since the dead piles occurred after a regional power failure it's likely that the shut-off of ventilation caused the pigs to suffocate from the loss of oxygen and build-up of toxic gases.

As CAFO managers should know in cases of animal mortality, "There are a number of special concerns that arise surrounding the disposal of carcasses. These include public health, animal health, and environmental concerns. Dead animals are a threat to public health because of intolerable odors and the potential spread of diseases such as Salmonellosis, Campylobacter, Clostridium perfringens, and other zoonotic diseases." FEMA "Livestock in Disasters", Unit 12, Pg.6

https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/downloads/is111_unit%2012.pdf

The cause of the suffering and ultimate death of these CAFO pigs was accidental. It was a horrible tragedy for the CAFO owner and workers to experience. The unassuming neighbors were forced to watch from afar as it unfolded and to finally alert the state regulators. Neighbors witnessed, at one point in the process, recognizable pig carcasses as the CAFO tried to compost the massive number of bodies and then spread them from a pile at the edge of a cornfield.

The horror was not over for the neighbors as large numbers of vultures began to circle and congregate on the rooftop of one of their homes. The vultures were prepared to do what the CAFO operator struggled to accomplish — cleaning up the dead pigs. Turkey Vultures are equipped with a special sense that allows them to locate carrion by odor. We stand by the truth of this reporting as innocent participants as the horror unfolded.



Photo by neighbor

Death Announcers and Ultimate Clean-up Crew

Neighbors photographed the carrion-attracted birds landing on the roof directly across the road from the CAFO.

Sierra Club Grassroots Network Food and Agriculture Team/National CAFO Sub-team

(Jan., 2025)