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EXTENSION DIVISION
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

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Guard Against Fowl Cholera

VIRGINIA DEAD BIRD DISPOSAL LAW

The Virginia dead bird disposal law was enacted to prevent the spread of infectious diseases from dead poultry to healthy flocks. While West Virginia does not have such a law, producers will greatly benefit by voluntarily disposing of dead birds in the proper manner.

The main points of the Virginia Dead Poultry Disposal Law are:

1. It applies to any farm or premise where 500 or more birds are kept.
2. It requires a disposal pit or incinerator on each of these farms.
3. The disposal pit must be at least 6' deep, at least 150 cu. ft. in capacity, covered with at least 12" of dirt, and with one or more tightly covered openings.
4. It defines an incinerator as a metal or masonry firebox in which dead poultry can be completely destroyed (burned to an ash).
5. It is unlawful for any person to keep poultry, or to enter into a contract with any other person involving the raising or keeping of poultry, on any premise not equipped with a disposal pit or incinerator.
6. All dead poultry must be disposed of in a disposal pit or incinerator, and in no other way.
7. A violation is a misdemeanor under the law.*

Fowl cholera organisms can live in soil contaminated by infected birds for as long as 3 months. The decaying carcass of an infected turkey may also contain cholera organisms for as much as 3 months or longer.

Birds, rodents and other animals may eat the infected carcass and carry fowl cholera to non-infected flocks. Consumption of infected carcasses by healthy turkeys also may serve as a source of infection. Prompt disposal of dead turkeys in an incinerator or an approved type disposal pit is necessary for your protection as well as that of neighboring flocks.

Be sure you are not in violation. On the other hand if you find a neighbor is violating the law, report the violation to the State Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

*From Circular 1027 entitled "Incinerator and Disposal Pit Facilities For Farm Animals."

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Proper dead bird disposal is just as essential as any other phase that has been emphasized in the Virginia Cholera Control Program.

If you do not have adequate disposal facilities, contact your county Extension Office and request a copy of Circular 1027, "Incinerator and Disposal Pit Facilities Recommended for Farm Animals."

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