



## **Understanding The 2019 Clean Air Strategy and what it means for the Agricultural Sector**

By Clare Quick

Living on a dairy farm and being an environmental loss adjuster can be an interesting combination, permitting me to fully understand the challenges that both industries face when there are changes to legislation and best practice guidelines.

The latest development affecting mainly dairy and beef farming is the 2019 Clean Air Strategy that sets out new enforcement powers across numerous sectors including agriculture with a renewed focus on reducing ammonia emissions. When ammonia reacts with nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide, it forms a secondary matter which can lead to significant impact on human health and sensitive habitats.



My family farm on the Somerset levels where it is very flat, is close to the coastline and therefore predominantly underlain by heavy clay. We supply milk on a supermarket contract and as part of our contract we have been working hard to reduce our carbon footprint. Thankfully we have much of the infrastructure in place that is required to meet the Strategy's recommendations as we were one of the first farms in the Southwest to have under floor slurry storage using a slatted floor system. However, it is a challenging time for some intensive beef and dairy farms that don't have the infrastructure to cope with the requirements set out in the new Strategy and large investment will be required.

Recommendations have been put forward by DEFRA to restrict the time farmers can spread untreated urea on fields. This is expected to be audited through the Red Tractor scheme and if this recommendation doesn't reduce emissions, then new legislation is likely to be brought into force imposing change.

It is recommended that farms spread untreated urea from 15<sup>th</sup> January to the end of March each year when soils are cooler. Farms will be keen to spread within this restricted time although heavy rain during winter months could generate greater run off from fields and potentially cause higher levels of pollutants within watercourses and habitats, which in then increases the risk of environmental liabilities arising.

Under the Clean Air Strategy, it is a recommendation that all slurry storage tanks have an impermeable cover by 2027 and are expected to hold 6 months' slurry supply. Many farms will have to arrange additional storage as they won't have sufficient capacity on the existing farm, some will purchase larger storage tanks and others will fill tanks to capacity and risk over filling which can give rise to a pollution incident and a resultant claim. If a storage tank with 6 months supply bursts, there will be a substantial environmental impact and claim costs would be significant. It is also more difficult to determine if a tank has an ongoing leak if the tank is covered and farms cannot see differing levels within the tank.



As we know, slurry storage is always a significant challenge and a major concern on any farm. Going forward, it will be stored in larger volumes and this in turn increases risk to the controlled waters and other sensitive environmental receptors if an escape or spillage occurs.

Finally, under the Clean Air Strategy, the government has stated an ambition that by 2025, all spreading of slurry and digestate is carried out using low carbon emission spreading equipment such as dribble bars, ground injection or umbilical systems. Whilst this will eradicate cross contamination and reduce emissions, it can often be difficult to quickly identify and stop an escape of product where there is a gradual leak on an umbilical system where slurry is escaping without the knowledge of the operator, resulting in a seepage into the environment and potentially significant damage to habitats and watercourses.

The agricultural industry is fast moving and has a keen focus on reducing emissions and its carbon footprint. QuestGates believe The Clean Air Strategy is a starting point for emission reduction and other factors will be introduced such as livestock diets and livestock grazing as well as farms calculating their own emissions.

The farming and insurance industry is changing and at QuestGates we have the knowledge, experience and expertise to manage pollution claims quickly and effectively whilst minimising the reputational damage to stakeholders as well as damage to the environment. This we achieve whilst maintaining up-to-date knowledge of how changes to legislation and guidelines can have an impact on the frequency and severity of such claims.