

Mind the gap – 2m and 10m buffer strips

Vegetated buffer strips of varying distances are used throughout Scotland to help ensure that on farm pollutants and run off do not get into watercourses. Maintaining these areas not only helps comply with the Diffuse Pollution General Binding Rules (DP GBRs), but also helps to protect water quality and biodiversity, improving farm environmental performance.

To comply with the DP GBRs, minimum distances for different activities near watercourses are in place. These cover activities including cultivation, poaching and erosion caused by livestock and organic and inorganic fertiliser application and storage. This information note looks at distances in relation to fertiliser application and in-field cultivation.

It is worth noting that the DP GBRs cover the whole of Scotland, not just those areas identified as having poor water quality status and identified as a "Priority Catchment".

2 metre buffer strip – no cultivation:



For the cultivation of crops, 2 metres from the top of the bank of any surface water is where you can safely start field work. This is where the cultivation mark must be.

This means ploughing within the 2 metres and then sowing a crop further in towards the field to ensure the crop edge is 2 metres from the top of the bank will not comply with the regulations.

Inorganic (bagged) fertiliser must not be applied to land that is within 2 metres from the top of the bank of any surface water.

The minimum 2 metre buffer strip when maintained will help keep the soil, fertiliser and nutrients in the field where it should be and not in the water environment.

A wider buffer strip may be needed to mitigate run off where, for instance, potatoes or carrots are grown on a slope which is towards the water environment.

Be aware - non compliance with Scotland's General Binding Rules could result in a Fixed Monetary Penalty fine

10 metre buffer strip – keeping a manure and slurry-free zone:



It is important that a 10 metre buffer strip, measured from the top of the bank of any surface water, is maintained when spreading slurry or farm yard manure. This is the minimum distance to comply with the Diffuse Pollution (Scotland) Regulations and Nitrate Vulnerable Zone Regulations.

If slurry or farm yard manure (FYM) is allowed to enter the water environment it can have serious effects, stripping the water of oxygen which can kill fish, and also cause a water 'downgrade' due to bacterial contamination. Once a waterbody has been affected it can take years for it to fully recover.

FYM, slurry and other types of fertiliser must not be stored within 10 metres of the top of the bank to prevent run off entering the water environment.

Along with a booklet outlining the GBRs, a handy tractor cab "Mind the Gap" sticker is available showing the minimum legal working distances from watercourses. Stickers and booklets can be picked up from Farming and Water Scotland at agricultural shows and FAS events or from your local SAC Consulting, RPID or SEPA Office. Information on the GBRs and practical ideas on how to reduce pollution risks are also available at www.farmingandwaterscotland.org

Aside from the loss of nutrients to the farm, slurry and manure getting into watercourses can affect other livestock using the water downstream and lead to wider consequences for other water users. For example, bathing water beaches are regularly monitored for their quality during the summer months. Bacteria from a range of sources, including slurry and FYM, can lead to illness for those using Scotland's waters for activities such as swimming, surfing or canoeing and lead to the receiving bathing water failing its quality checks and given a poor water quality status.

Mind the Gap

Minimum legal working distances from watercourses

Within 2m of watercourse	2m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No application of inorganic fertiliser No cultivation (2m from top of bank)
Within 5m of a watercourse	5m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent significant poaching
Within 5m of spring, well or borehole*	5m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No fertiliser application No cultivation No livestock
Within 10m of a watercourse	10m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No slurry or manure application No storage of fertilisers (including temporary field middens) No livestock feeders
Within 50m of a spring, well or borehole*	50m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No storage of fertilisers (including temporary field middens) No slurry or manure application

* refers to any spring which supplies water for human consumption or any well or borehole that is not capped to prevent water ingress

In the event of a pollution incident, contact the SEPA Pollution Helpline on **0800 80 70 60**

For more information on diffuse pollution and how you can reduce risks and benefit the farm business, see www.farmingandwaterscotland.org

Funded by the Scottish Government as part of its Pollution Prevention Advisory Activity.