

# Livestock Handling Safety

Texas Department of Insurance  
Division of Workers' Compensation  
Workplace Safety

HS94-042G (9-07)

## Goal

This program provides ideas and suggestions for reducing the number of accidents that occur while working with livestock.

## Objective

Farm and ranch personnel working with livestock will be able to identify hazardous conditions and situations that could result in injury.

## Background

The Purdue University Extension statistics indicate that one in six farm injuries involves animals, while the National Agricultural Safety Database statistics show that one in three farm injuries involve animals. The most frequent types of injuries include being stepped on, being knocked down, kicked, animal bites, and being pinned between an animal and a hard surface. Many of the hazards involved in working with farm animals can be reduced, and injuries prevented, by taking a few basic precautions and observing safety rules. In addition, Dr. Temple Grandin, of Colorado State University, has demonstrated that the use of safe and gentle livestock handling techniques results in a higher quality final product. Agitated animals often become "dark cutters" which grade lower and have bruised meat which must be trimmed out during processing, decreasing the profitability of the animal.

## Facts

Animals sense their surroundings very differently according to Agricultural MU Guide published by University Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia. Many animals see in black and white, not color. Cows and pigs have poor depth perception and difficulty in judging distances. For this reason cows are apparently unable to distinguish the difference between a real cattle guard and parallel stripes painted on a road. Some animals' eyes sense movement better than human eyes. Cattle have almost 360° panoramic vision and can be spooked by quick movements behind them (see Figure 1).

Due to their sensitive hearing, livestock are able to detect sounds that humans cannot hear. Loud noises easily frighten them. Dr. Grandin's research shows high frequency sounds actually hurt animals' ears. This may explain why some animals are skittish and/or balky in unfamiliar surroundings.

The following signs may indicate aggression or fear in the animals you work with:

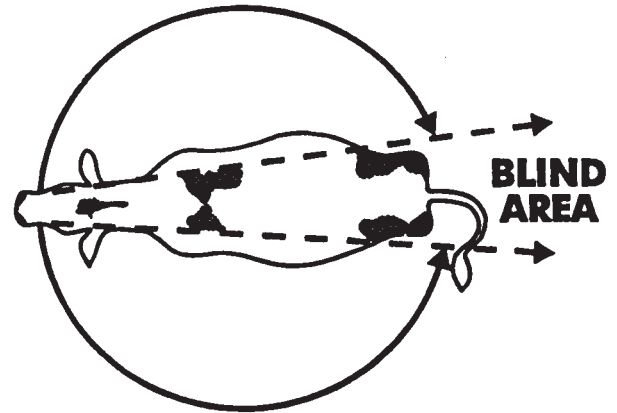


Figure 1

- raised or pinned (flattened) ears;
- raised tail or rapidly lashing tail;
- raised hair on the back;
- bared teeth;
- pawing the ground;
- stiff-legged gate or posture;
- snorting; and/or
- growling.

## Accident Prevention

Livestock handling methods may vary greatly, but there are some general rules for working with animals.

- void quick movements or loud noises.
- Establish a routine.
- Move slowly and deliberately around livestock.
- Never prod an animal when it has nowhere to go.
- Touch animals gently rather than shoving or bumping them.
- Keep children away from animals and livestock handling areas.
- Respect animals-their size and bulk make them potentially dangerous.
- Provide special facilities for male animals.
- Be cautious when working around male animals-they are more aggressive by nature.
- Animals have strong maternal instincts so be extra careful around newborns.
- Be cautious around animals that are frightened.
- Always have an escape route when working in close quarters with animals.

## Facilities

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Many injuries to livestock and farm personnel are related to poor facilities, housekeeping and/or faulty equipment. Irregular surfaces and cluttered walkways present numerous opportunities for slip, trip and fall accidents. These tips will provide conditions to help reduce injuries:

- Concrete flooring with a rough finish to provide firmer footing.
- Good drainage and slatted floors help prevent slipping.
- Grooved walkways in high traffic areas provide better footing.
- Strong, durable fencing and gates securely contain livestock.
- Sharp, protruding objects must be removed to avoid puncture wounds.
- Lighting should be even because shadows cast by uneven lighting tend to frighten animals.
- Alleys and chutes should be wide enough for animals to pass through but not wide enough to turn around.

Good housekeeping is also essential for personal safety, and the health and safety of your livestock.

## Health and Hygiene

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Good hygiene is vital to livestock management, especially in confined areas where diseases spread quickly.

It is important to maintain a clean, dry environment. Other factors are also crucial to animal health. Good ventilation minimizes dust. Various molds that cause respiratory and digestive problems may be present in feed. Check feed carefully for contamination before feeding. Dealing with reputable feed dealers reduces the chance of purchasing contaminated feed.

Take preventive measures to limit the transmission of diseases like anthrax, leptospirosis, rabies, brucellosis, Q-fever and tuberculosis from livestock to humans. These measures include:

- clean and well-ventilated animal facilities;
- testing and immunization of livestock; and
- use of sanitary practices to handle animals and animal by-products.

## Review

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1. Which of the following behaviors may indicate that an animal is aggressive or frightened?
  - a. Failure to make eye contact, standing still with its eyes closed, and reaching out to sniff your hand.
  - b. Rapidly lashing tail, pawing the ground, and stiff-legged gait.
  - c. Standing with its back to you, watching the gate, and bobbing its head.
  - d. None of the above.
2. Some general rules that apply to working with animals are
  - a. Always have an escape route, establish a routine, and avoid quick movements and loud noises.
  - b. Work in dim lighting, always use an electric prod, and rush at animals to get them to move faster.
  - c. Be extra cautious around mothers and newborns as well as mature male animals.
  - d. Both a and c.
3. The flooring that is best suited to prevent injuries from livestock is
  - a. Smooth finish concrete without grooved walkways.
  - b. Astroturf.
  - c. Rough finished concrete with grooved walkways.
  - d. Rough cut planking.
4. Even lighting in livestock facilities is beneficial because.
  - a. It prevents shadows which may frighten animals.
  - b. It's easier to see the animals' identification tags.
  - c. It saves energy and reduces utility costs.
  - d. There is no benefit.
5. What problems are caused by a cow's almost panoramic vision?
  - a. You can't sneak up on them.
  - b. It may cause them to be spooked by quick movements behind them.
  - c. It causes them to see in three dimensions.
  - d. They often need corrective surgery on their eyes.

6. When do animals tend to be most aggressive?
- During the full moon, after they have eaten, and during the heat of the day.
  - When they have newborns, when they are mature, intact males, and when they are prodded with nowhere to go.
  - At sunset, when its foggy, and when their mid-day feeding is late.
  - They are ALWAYS aggressive.
7. What livestock diseases may be transmitted from livestock to humans?
- Chicken pox, measles, bovine flu, and colic.
  - Parvo, blackleg, screwworms, and bots.
  - Founder, acidosis, milk fever, and thrush.
  - Tuberculosis, anthrax, leptospirosis, and rabies.
  - Hay lung, lumbago, wet brain, and ketosis.
8. How can the transmission of disease between humans and animals be minimized?
- Clean and well-ventilated animal facilities.
  - Testing and immunization of livestock.
  - Use of sanitary practices to handle animals.
  - All of the above.



## Answers

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- b
- d
- c
- a
- b
- b
- d
- d

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## Resources

The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI, DWC) Resource Center offers a workers' health and safety video tape library. Call (512) 804-4620 for more information or visit our web site at [www.tdi.state.tx.us](http://www.tdi.state.tx.us).

Disclaimer: Information contained in this training program is considered accurate at time of publication.

The Texas Department of Insurance,  
Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI, DWC)  
E-mail [resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us](mailto:resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us)  
or call 1-800-687-7080 for more information.

*Safety Violations Hotline*  
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