

Handling Cattle

Injuries from cattle relate to a number of factors - inadequate yard design, lack of training of handlers, unsafe work practices, and the weight, sex, stress factor and temperament of animals.

Spot the hazard

- Check accident records to identify tasks most likely to cause injury.
- Consider situations that cause stress and injury to handlers and stock.
- Take into account sex, weight and temperament of stock.
- Consider effects of weather and herding on animal behavior, and time allowed for settling down.
- Check potential hazards and safety advantages of stock facilities, including mechanical aids and work layout.
- Consider what training is required before a person can confidently and competently handle stock.

Assess the risk

- Using accident records, check which tasks and work situations are most frequently linked with injuries.
- Discuss safety concerns of handlers in regard to various tasks.
- Check each identified hazard for likelihood and severity of injury.
- Assess proposed safeguards and safe procedures for other hazards.

Make the changes

Here are some suggestions for improving safety in cattle handling.

- Always plan ahead. Prepare and communicate safe work practices. Get assistance if necessary.
- Wear appropriate clothing, including protective footwear and a hat for sun protection.
- Make use of facilities and aids - head rails, branding cradles, whips, drafting canes, dogs etc.
- Know the limitations of yourself and others - work within those limitations.
- Respect cattle - they have the strength and speed to cause injury.

Facilities and conditions

- Yards and sheds should be strong enough and of a size to match the cattle being handled.
- Good yard design assists the flow of stock. Avoid sharp, blind corners, and ensure gates are well positioned.
- Keep facilities in good repair and free from protruding rails, bolts, wire etc.
- Where cattle need restraining, use crushes, head rails, cradles, etc.
- Footholds and well-placed access ways are important.
- Try to maintain yards in non-slippery condition.
- Cattle are more unpredictable during cold, windy weather.

The stock

- Hazards vary according to the age, sex, breed, weight, horn status, temperament and training of animals.
- Approach cattle quietly, and make sure they are aware of your presence.
- Bulls are more aggressive during mating season and extremely dangerous when fighting. Separate into different yards where appropriate.
- Cows and heifers are most likely to charge when they have a young calf at foot.
- Heifers can also be dangerous at weaning time.
- Isolated cattle often become stressed and are more likely to charge when approached.
- Cattle with sharp horns are dangerous - dehorning is recommended where practicable. Dehorned and polled cattle can still cause injury.

Cattle yards

- Avoid working in overstocked yards where you risk being crushed or trampled.

- While drafting cattle through a gate, work from one side to avoid being knocked down by an animal trying to go through.
- Take care when working with cattle in a crush, e.g. to vaccinate, apply tail tags, etc. A sudden movement by stock could crush your arms against rails or posts.
- When closing a gate behind cattle in a crush or small yard, stand to one side, or with one foot on the gate in case the mob forces the gate back suddenly.

Kicking and butting

- To avoid kick injuries, attempt to work either outside the animal's kicking range or directly against the animal, where the effect of being kicked will be minimized.
- In dairies there is a high risk of being kicked. Try to follow a regular routine so as not to alarm cows - e.g. by placing cold water on their teats.
- When working on an animal's head, use head bail to restrain it from sudden movement forwards or back.
- Take care when using hazardous equipment, such as brands or knives for castrating or bang tailing.

Stud cattle

- When working with stud cattle, train animals to accept intensive handling through gradual familiarization, e.g. grooming, washing, clipping.
- When leading cattle on a halter, never wrap the lead rope round your arm or hand. If the animal gets out of control, you could be dragged.
- Bulls should be fitted with a nose ring. When being led, their heads should be held up by the nose lead.

Hygiene

- Be aware of the risks of contracting such diseases as Leptospirosis or Q Fever when working with animals. These diseases are transmitted through contact with blood, saliva and urine.
- Hygiene is important. Consider vaccinating herds against such diseases.