

Horse and Cattle Handling Safety Fatality File



Farmer dies from injuries after being attacked by bull

A 53-year-old farmer who worked with her husband in a family dairy operation was injured by a 2 ½-year-old Holstein bull during morning milking chores. On the day of the incident, the victim and her husband began their usual chores: the wife was in the dairy building working cows in the holding pen through the milking parlor to milk, while her husband was in the nearby barn, cleaning the floors with a skid loader. When his wife did not come out of the milking area after starting a group of cows on the milking machines, the husband went into the parlor to check on her. He found her lying near the gate between the holding pen and the milking area. She was unable to move and told her husband the bull in the holding pen had struck her from behind. The husband moved her into the milking area, secured the cattle in the holding pen, and called 911. First responders arrived and transported the woman to the hospital. The woman was awake and oriented upon arrival but in critical condition with multiple blunt-force injuries and a near-severed spinal cord. Her condition deteriorated, and she died three days later. The factors contributing to this fatal injury include working alone and working in an enclosed area where a bull was in the presence of one or more cows likely in estrus.

The following recommendations are made to prevent future occurrences:

1. Maintain constant awareness of the location and behavior of bulls when entering a holding area or pasture. Work with a partner, when possible, rather than alone.
2. Recognize scenarios and behaviors indicating that bulls are likely to threaten or attack.
3. Cull bulls from the herd upon first display of aggressive or frenzied behavior toward handlers.

In addition to the specific recommendations above related to this case, dairy producers should warn visitors and others unfamiliar with dairy bulls' potentially aggressive behavior to not enter pastures, holding pens, or corrals where livestock are present. When planning dairy facilities, include a secure holding facility where bulls can be routed and held during milking, and accessible escape routes or protected areas such as passage gates for working in close quarters with livestock. If economically feasible, consider using artificial insemination to eliminate the need for dairy bulls on site.