

# Horse and Cattle Handling Safety Meeting Kit



## What's At Stake

Horses and cattle can move unpredictably, and workers should remain constantly alert. These large animals can cause injuries due to sudden movements or bites; they can also cause scratches, and "zoonosis," which is a process by which a variety of diseases can be spread from animals to humans.

## What's the Danger

### BASIC HORSE BEHAVIOR

- Horses detect danger through their vision, sense of smell and keen sense of hearing. They have wide-angle vision, but they also have blind spots directly behind and in front of themselves.
- For example, when it lifts its head and pricks its ears, it is focusing on something far away. The horse lowers its head when focusing on low, close objects. Keep these blind spots in mind and know where your horse's attention is focused so you do not scare it.
- Your horse's ears will give you clues; they will point in the direction in which its attention is focused. Ears that are "laid back," or flattened backward, warn you that the horse is getting ready to kick or bite.
- Always work with calm but deliberate movements around horses. Nervous handlers can make horses nervous, creating unsafe situations.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

### APPROACHING THE HORSE

- When catching a horse, approach from its left shoulder. Move slowly but confidently, speaking to the horse as you approach. Read the horse's intention by watching its body language.
- Be careful when approaching a horse that is preoccupied, such as when its head is in a hay manger.
- When approaching a horse in a stall, speak to the horse to get its attention and wait until it turns and faces you before entering and make sure the horse moves over before you walk in beside it.
- Speak to your horse and keep your hands on it when moving around it. Even if a horse is aware of your presence, it can be startled by quick movements.
- When approaching from the rear, advance at an angle speaking to the horse, making sure you have its attention. Touch it gently as you pass by its

hindquarters.

## **CATTLE HANDLING PRINCIPLES**

Alarmed and over-excited cattle are dangerous. Give them time to settle down, particularly when they've just been moved into the yards. They'll be a lot easier and safer to work with.

**Use gentle handling.** Cattle have good memories. They learn quickly and they soon work out who frightens them and who treats them well. Sometimes they will get stressed, such as during castration, weaning and the first milking. If you treat them gently at those times, it'll pay off in the future.

**Learn the 'flight zone'.** The 'flight zone' is the term for how close you can get to cattle before they start moving. The flight zone can be 5 metres or less for regularly-handled dairy cattle. A herd of beef cattle that have been handled infrequently will start moving if you get within 100 metres. Entering the cattle's flight zone will get them moving. The closer you get, the faster they will move away. Manage their movement speed by how close you get to them. Likewise, to stop them moving, step out of their flight zone.

**Balance lines.** Cattle have two balance lines. One runs across the shoulders and the other runs along the backbone. When you're working up close, whichever way you move through those lines, the animal will move the other way:

- If you're alongside the animal and move forward, it will move backward.
- If you go back, it will go forward.
- If you're in front and move to the left, it will move to your right.

**Use your voice.** Your voice is a useful cattle handling tool. Good cattle handlers use their voices to calm and soothe. Most importantly, your voice lets the cattle know where you are.

Cattle can't see the way we can. The cow's eyes, on either side of their head, give them a wide range of vision. But when they look at something with one eye, they can't work out distances. They can't see directly behind at all.

If they detect movement to the side or the rear, they will spook. But if they can hear you, they know where you are and are more likely to feel calmer.

**Use a waddy.** Carry a length of pipe or a long stick (a waddy). Put a piece of cloth on the end to make a flag. A waddy makes you look bigger. It may also give you confidence when handling difficult animals.

If you stand facing the cow with your waddy outstretched, you're domineering and positive. If you want to take pressure off – for example, when a bull is giving you a dirty look – you can take the heat out of the situation by lowering the waddy and turning side-on.

**Be firm.** Only use electric prodders as a last resort for handling cattle. Do not use the prodder on an animal that has no room to move forward. Do not use the prodder on an animal for more than one second at a time, and for no more than five times in a row. Give every animal an adequate break after each time you use the prodder. Do not use an electric prodder on sensitive areas, including the udder, eyes, nose, anus, vulva or testicles. Only use electric prodders on adult cattle.

Don't chase cattle. They'll see you as a predator and fear you. Avoid this particularly with young dairy cattle because you need to handle them frequently. Instead, walk confidently and quietly toward them.

## **ALL ABOUT BULLS – NEVER TURN YOUR BACK ON A BULL**

Bulls are more dangerous the older they get. Never trust a bull – particularly the ‘lone bull’ reared or kept in isolation.

Avoid handling bulls alone, particularly if you are not as fast or agile as you could be, whether through age or injury. There are logical exceptions, such as excellent bull facilities where no direct contact is needed.

If you get cornered by a bull, shout loudly and strike it repeatedly on the nose with a waddy to make it close its eyes, then get out of there as fast as you can.

If you’re trying to get a bull, or cattle, away from an injured person, make lots of noise, use your waddy and don’t put yourself in harm’s way. Shout for help.

Use vehicles, such as a tractor or Ute, when dealing with bulls in the paddock. These are better than working on foot, a quad bike or two-wheeled motorbike.

Use bulls that produce docile offspring. In all cases, without exception, send aggressive bulls to slaughter.

## **FINAL WORD**

An understanding of the behavioral principles of animal handling helps to reduce accidents. Calm, quiet handling also makes animal handling safer. It is essential to keep facilities well maintained and to have nonslip flooring. There are inherent dangers when handling large animals.