

Safe cattle handling equipment



Does your farm handle cattle?

This HSE leaflet provides general advice for farmers who want to improve their cattle handling system to make it safer and more efficient.

To reduce the risk of injury to you and your employees, as well as visitors, such as vets and statutory inspectors, when handling cattle you should have:

- proper handling facilities, which are well maintained and in good working order;
- a race and a crush suitable for the animals to be handled;
- trained and competent staff; and
- a rigorous culling policy for temperamental animals.

What are the risks?

- Handling cattle always involves a risk of injury from crushing, kicking, butting or goring.
- The risk is greater if the animals have not been handled frequently, such as those from hills or moorland, sucklers or newly calved cattle.
- Certain jobs may increase the risk, eg veterinary work.
- Never underestimate the risk from cattle, even with good precautions in place.

The race

- Animals should be able to readily enter the race, which should have a funnel end.
- Make sure there is enough room in the collecting pen for them to feed into the funnel easily.
- A circular collecting pen means staff can stand safely behind a forcing gate as they move animals into the race, and keep the animals moving.
- Animals need to see clearly to the crush and beyond, so that they will readily move along the race.
- The race may be curved, but should not include tight turns.
- Animals are more prepared to move towards a light area than into the dark.
- The sides of the race should be high enough to prevent animals from jumping over them, and they should be properly secured to the ground and to each other for maximum strength.
- Sheet the sides of the race to help keep cattle moving by reducing visual disturbances such as shadows and other animals.
- Contain the lead animal in the race while it waits its turn in the crush.
- Hinged or sliding doors are suitable, but be sure they are operated from the working side of the race so the operator does not have to reach across the race to close the gate.
- Never work on an animal in the crush with an unsecured animal waiting in the race behind.



The crush

A crush should allow most straightforward tasks to be carried out in safety (including oral treatments, ear tagging and work from the rear end). It should:

- have a locking front gate and yoke (ideally self-locking) to allow the animal's head to be firmly held. Additional head bars will prevent the animal tossing its head up and injuring people;
- have a rump rail, chain or bar to minimise forward and backward movement of the animal. Make sure this is always used;
- be secured to the ground or, if mobile, to a vehicle;
- be positioned to allow you to work safely around it, without the risk of contact with other animals, and have good natural or artificial lighting;
- allow gates etc to open smoothly with the minimum of effort and noise. Regular maintenance will help;
- have a slip-resistant floor, made of sound hardwood bolted into place (nails are not suitable), metal chequer-plate, or with a rubber mat over the base.

Specialised tasks, such as belly or foot trimming, require a purpose-designed crush with adequate restraint and enough room to work safely.

Other equipment

- Consider the need for shedding gates after the crush to allow animals to be sorted into groups.
- Work around the crush will be more convenient if it is under cover with a workbench nearby (for documentation, veterinary medicines, instruments etc).
- Do not use makeshift gates and hurdles – they will make handling more difficult and increase the risk of injury.
- Never use sticks and prods to strike an animal – this may breach welfare legislation as well as agitating the animal.
- Before beginning work on any animal, check that it will be adequately restrained from kicking – consider whether you should use an anti-kicking device.

Further information

This leaflet is not available from HSE Books. A downloadable version is on the agriculture pages of the HSE website: www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture

HSE Agriculture Information Sheet AIS35 *Handling and housing cattle* is available free from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995. It can also be downloaded from HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais35.pdf

Technical Notes TN564 *Modifying existing cattle handling systems to improve human safety* and TN565 *Recommendations for the design of new, safe and efficient cattle handling systems* are available from SAC, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JG.

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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