

## Unit Thirteen

# Transportation Accidents / Euthanasia

## Overview

In this unit you will learn about transportation accidents involving animals and how to mitigate accidents. You will also learn about some of the issues that surround euthanasia of animals.

## Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify common causes of transportation accidents
- List common methods to mitigate transportation accidents
- Identify important considerations for euthanasia
- Determine your vulnerability to transportation accidents
- Determine your level of understanding of the issues surrounding euthanasia of animals

## Transportation Accidents

Every year millions of livestock are transported on U.S. roads. It is not surprising, therefore, that transportation accidents involving animals are one of the most common disasters that horse and livestock owners will encounter.

Transportation accidents are usually small in scale. However, dealing with accidents quickly and effectively often requires a high level of coordination among law enforcement, fire departments, emergency management, the haulers, and the owners.

## Mitigation of Accidents

Mitigation of transportation accidents includes using properly designed trailers and maintaining equipment used to haul livestock.

The size of the towing vehicle should match the size and weight of the loaded trailer.

Following are examples of how to mitigate transportation accidents:

## **Trailer design**

- Use proper hitch and tow equipment, such as sway bars and safety chains that are appropriate for the trailer being towed.
- Trailers should be of sufficient height and depth for the type and number of animals being transported.
- Floorboards should be solid and in good condition to carry the weight of the animals in transport.
- Rubber mats on the floor and tailgate provide traction and cushion during loading, unloading, and travel.
- Sharp points or edges (chest bar, stall sides) should be adequately covered to prevent injury to animals.
- Interior lights are useful for night time and emergency travel.

## **Trailer maintenance**

- Floorboards should be inspected regularly and treated (wood), repaired, or replaced (metal) if needed.
- The trailer should be inspected regularly for loose nails and screws. Loose nails should be removed and loose screws tightened.
- Tires should have at least 0.25” of tread or more if required by the state Division of Motor Vehicles. Tires should be inflated to the proper pressure for which the trailer is loaded.
- Jacks and safety triangles should be in good working order.
- Ignitable flares should not be stored in the trailer.
- Hitch welds, safety chain welds, and snaps should be in good repair. The hitch ball should be greased regularly.
- Electrical wiring should be maintained. Cracked, scraped, or exposed wires should be replaced. Loose connections should be cleaned and repaired or replaced.
- Wheel bearings, springs, and shock absorbers should be inspected and lubricated regularly. If necessary, these should be replaced.

## Preparedness

The best preparedness to prevent transportation accidents includes safe driving behavior and safe animal handling. The following are some examples.

### Safe driving strategies

- If only one animal is being transported, load it on the left side of the trailer. If two animals are being loaded, place the heavier one on the left. This will make towing the trailer smoother because of the crown contour of the road surface. The ride will also be easier for the animal(s).
- Check animals in trailers at least every 100 miles. At this time the animals should be watered, if necessary, and the hitch, wiring, lights, and safety chains should be checked.
- When parking a trailer, wheel chocks should always be used. These must be kept in good condition at all times.
- Trailers should only be backed up by experienced drivers, or with the help of another person who can assure that the direction is safe.
- When traveling, do not throw cigarettes out of the window, as these can be blown into the trailer and cause fire.

### Safe animal handling

- Do not tie animals to unhitched trailers, as many animals are strong enough to pull the trailer away.
- Trailers should not be unhitched with animals inside them, nor should animals be loaded into unhitched trailers. Animals should always be unloaded before unhitching the trailer.

## Impact & Consequences

Transportation accidents are associated with many adverse impacts and consequences. The following table presents some commonly reported problems that arise because of transportation accidents involving livestock and the unit where you can learn more about the consequences.

Impact	Consequence	Refer to Unit #
Confusion may result from an accident in which people or animals are injured	Communications are challenged	5
Transportation routes can be obstructed	Infrastructure failure	6
Panicked livestock or other animals could injure themselves and people	Threat to public and animal safety and health	7 and 10
Collision may occur with a vehicle carrying hazardous materials	Need to evacuate people and animals	8 and 10
Livestock can escape following a transportation accident	Displacement of animals	9
Transportation accidents can create dangers for the environment	Adverse effects on the natural environment and wildlife	11
Animals can die in transportation accidents	Need for carcass disposal	12
Animals may be badly injured and in need of humane treatment following a transportation accident	Need for euthanasia	This unit
Animals may be injured, if they are not killed	Threat to the well-being of animals	14
Dead and injured animals in traffic accidents attract the public's attention	Public concern	15

## Euthanasia

Euthanasia means humane killing.

There are many circumstances in disasters under which an animal may have to be euthanized. The largest number of animals that may need to be euthanized will likely be in a Foreign Animal Disease outbreak. Foreign Animal Diseases include Classical Swine fever (hog cholera) and Foot and Mouth Disease.

Depending on the Foreign Animal Disease, preemptive slaughter policies may need to be implemented to safeguard the animal population at large. Preemptive slaughter involves killing healthy animals that are at risk of spreading the disease to others if they become infected. These animals are usually located in farms adjacent to infected farms.

## Prioritization of animals

A sad, but real, side of some disasters is the need to prioritize which animal to save. This is particularly important for large breeding and stable operations, racetracks, and rare breeds farms, where it might not be possible to evacuate or save all of the animals following a sudden impact incident. Every farm owner and stable manager should have clearly prioritized which animals they should protect in the event of a sudden disaster incident, such as a fire, tornado, flash flood, or power outage. This allows a rational approach to rescue in the event of such an occurrence.

In this unit, we will examine some of the issues surrounding euthanasia by examining transportation accidents. Accidents are one of the most common causes of debilitating injury to animals. When such an injury occurs, the need to euthanize an animal may arise.

Many types of disasters in which animals may need to be euthanized are described in other units of this course.

## Methods for Euthanasia

A detailed discussion of the methods of euthanasia is beyond the scope of this course. However, there are many authoritative references on methods for euthanasia. These include those published by the American Veterinarian Medical Association, producer groups, and humane societies. If you think you may have to euthanize an animal, familiarize yourself with these procedures before the need arises.

Professional animal care providers often deal with euthanasia nearly every day in practice. Protocols that are established for everyday practice are often the best in disasters too.

## Good Samaritan Laws

Euthanizing an animal when the owner is present is a difficult choice. In most cases it is the owner, and sometimes the insurance company that holds the policy for the animal, that has to make the decision to euthanize an animal. The owner is responsible for gathering the appropriate information to make that decision.

If the animal's owner is not at the scene, someone else will have to make that decision. Under these circumstances, Good Samaritan laws may apply.

Good Samaritan laws protect people rendering aid or assistance to accident or disaster victims against liability. Good Samaritan laws, however, are quite complex and vary among states. Therefore, it is advisable to familiarize yourself with the laws in your own state as well as neighboring states, in case of a multi-state disaster, or if you are transporting animals across state lines.

### For people

Examples of the scope of variation that occurs between Good Samaritan laws of different states are:

- In some states, permission is required before helping a conscious victim
- In other states, if a victim is unconscious, badly injured, or too ill to respond, the assumption is made that he/she would give consent
- Yet in other states, any able-bodied person may be required to provide assistance if the situation arises

Good Samaritan laws do not protect against acts of negligence.

### For animals

Most states do not have Good Samaritan laws that apply directly to the needs of animals.

While the Good Samaritan Laws discussed above usually do not apply when owners bring their animals to a veterinary clinic for treatment, some states have Animal Good Samaritan Laws. Examples are Texas and California.

The Texas Animal Good Samaritan Law states that:

*“a veterinarian who on his own initiative or at the request of a person other than the owner renders emergency treatment to an ill or injured animal is*

*not liable to the owner for damages to the animal except in case of gross negligence. If a veterinarian performs euthanasia on the animal it is presumed that it was a humane act necessary to relieve pain and suffering.”*

In California, similar laws also protect veterinarians if they act at the request of the owner or at the request of someone other than the owner.

## **Case 1: Overtaken trailer**

A tractor-trailer is transporting 65 calves from a farm to a heifer-raising facility. At a sharp turn on an Interstate exit, the driver loses control and the trailer overturns. Several of the calves are killed, while others suffer varying degrees of injury.

### **What are your concerns?**

*What are some immediate concerns that involve preventing further injury to people and animals?*

The state highway patrol secures the area and calls a local veterinarian. The veterinarian is concerned that several of the severely injured calves will need intensive care at great cost. Because it would be unusual to perform such intensive procedures on calves, the veterinarian would like to talk to the owner for a decision on how to proceed. However, the owner is not present.

### **How would you contact the owner?**

*What are some concerns about treatment of animals if the owner is not present?*

The driver should have information about the owner and how to contact him/her. As long as the driver is not injured, this information may be easy to obtain. In this case, the driver was bruised, but able to provide information on the owner. He also had information on the insurance company that covered his freight (the calves) in transit.

The veterinarian tries to contact the owner. Despite multiple attempts, the owner cannot be contacted. After a discussion with the state police and truck driver, a consensus is reached that two calves with open fractures and another one with a perforated abdomen should be euthanized to prevent further suffering.

The veterinarian was successful in contacting the insurance company. He asked for their permission to euthanize the animals. The insurance company also agreed to pay for the cost of the animals and services provided by the veterinarian.

### **What would you do?**

*What are the implications of the veterinarian charging the owner to care for these calves?*

As long as the veterinarian does not charge the owner for his services, the veterinarian is likely to be covered by Good Samaritan laws. However, if the veterinarian charges for his or her services, Good Samaritan laws may not apply.

Fortunately, when this owner was finally contacted, he did not contest the veterinarian's charges. Instead, he paid the bill and then submitted the charges to the insurance company of the trucker and requested reimbursement from him. This bill was paid.

### **Invoking Good Samaritan laws**

General recommendations that should be followed if Good Samaritan laws for the care of animals are to be invoked include:

- Make every attempt to contact the owner and/or insurance company, and, if possible, document these attempts and any conversations. The comments/suggestions of the owner should be in writing. If verbal instructions for euthanasia are the only confirmation available, ensure a third person witnesses the instructions.
- Render only treatment that is necessary to prevent suffering or worsening of the medical condition.
- Continue treatment until arrangements can be made for removal and future care of the animal.
- Gather and maintain records of services provided and pertinent information from witnesses at the scene.
- Use good judgment and restraint in discussing the nature of the accident, the condition of the animals, and what is done to them with anyone

## Maintain a situation log

In disasters, including the response to a trailer accident, things can happen very quickly, and many factors go into making decisions. People dealing with disasters often have difficulty remembering details. Therefore, it is useful to keep a log of the situation, things that happened, and people interviewed. A situation log that details your involvement from start to finish can save you much anguish later.

## Case 2: Train derailment

A train carrying circus animals is on its way through Wisconsin. An unfortunate incident occurs when the train derailed. Several animals are killed immediately. Others, including an elephant, a tiger, and a seal, are severely injured.

### What are your concerns?

*What are some concerns about handling circus and other exotic animals?*

Based on their injuries, the animals have a grave prognosis and euthanasia appears to be the humane option. The owner and the animals' keepers are all present, and they agree that some of the animals are unlikely to survive their injuries.

As a group they decide to euthanize a severely injured seal and an elephant. However, the decision is also made to try everything possible to treat a severely injured tiger. The injured seal was already very old and had a problem with arthritis. He had only performed intermittently over the last few years. The elephant had broken its leg and the prognosis for recovery and a happy life without prolonged suffering were grave.

### What would you do?

*If you needed to kill an elephant or a seal, how would you do it?*

The care, including the euthanasia, of exotic animals is best performed by skilled personnel.

These large and dangerous animals may need to be heavily sedated. Sometimes specialized equipment, such as a dart gun, is required to sedate circus animals. The use of a loaded dart gun requires a valid license. Most accredited zoos and circuses have personnel and equipment to perform euthanasia of the animals under their care. However, if these personnel are not available, American Zoological Association-accredited zoos may be able to help.

### What are your concerns?

*What might be the consequences of the decision to euthanize an animal?*

The elephant keeper had worked with this elephant for nearly 20 years. For months after the incident, the keeper suffered from severe depression.

## **What Can You Do?**

Perhaps the most important thing to recognize about stress following a critical incident is to recognize that stress reactions are normal.

The need for mental health counseling after disasters is very real, and common precipitating causes of stress are death and euthanasia of animals. Special attention should be given to identifying persons affected by negative emotions in disasters, and every attempt should be made to assure they receive the help they need. Appendix A in this unit lists sources of stress.

The signs in Appendix B are reactions to stress that people may display if they need professional counseling.

## **Coping with stress**

Personal methods to cope with stress include shaping one's environment in such a way that stress is minimized or averted. Other examples of simple steps you can take are summarized in Appendix C of this unit.

Emergency management professionals are increasingly learning to cope with stress through Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD). These are structured meetings of emergency management personnel, mental health professionals, and peers to lessen the impact of major events on emergency service personnel. They are intended to accelerate normal recovery in normal people who are experiencing normal stress after experiencing highly abnormal events.

CISD meetings are often held within 72 hours of the incident, but sometimes much later. The longer the period between the incident and the debriefing, the less impact the debriefing will have. The best counselors to conduct CISD meetings have had practical experience in the work environment in which disaster responders work.

Asking for and obtaining counseling, participating in critical incident stress debriefings, or talking to a minister should never be an additional source of stress.

## Assess Your Vulnerability

<b>Transportation Accidents</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Vulnerability Score</b>
1. How often do you transport livestock? 1 (no more than a few times a year)—5 (at least once a week in the busy season)	
2. Based on the recommendations in this unit, is your trailer properly designed and do you follow recommended safe driving instructions? 1 (yes, I meet these criteria)—5 (there are several areas for improvement)	
3. What is your vulnerability to transportation accidents? Add 1 and 2	Enter this number on page 16-3
<b>Euthanasia, Stress</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Vulnerability Score</b>
1. Have you discussed euthanasia of your animals with your friends and family or your veterinarian? 1 (yes)—5 (no) (intermediate scores indicate that you have only had superficial discussions)	
2. Based on the materials provided in Appendix 13A and 13B, how well do you recognize stress in yourself and how well do you handle your stress? 1 (very well)—5 (not well at all)	
3. What is your vulnerability to stress? Add 1 and 2	Enter this number on page 16-5



### Learning Check

**Directions:** Determine if the following statements are true or false based on the material in this unit. When you have finished, check your answers on page 13-15.

1. Transportation accidents may be the most common disaster that livestock owners experience.  
True or False?
  
2. Transportation accidents often require coordination among law enforcement, fire department, emergency management, the hauler and owner.  
True or False?
  
3. Mitigation of transportation accidents involves the use of properly designed trailers and regular trailer maintenance.  
True or False?
  
4. Mitigation of transportation accidents includes regular inspection of the floorboards.  
True or False?
  
5. Mitigation of transportation accidents includes regular lubrication of wheel bearings and replacement of shock absorbers.  
True or False?
  
6. Preparedness for transportation accidents includes safe driving and animal handling.  
True or False?



**Learning Check**

7. While transporting livestock, the animals should be checked at least every 500 miles.  
True or False?
  
8. If only one horse is loaded into a double horse trailer, it should be loaded on the right side.  
True or False?
  
9. Safe animal handling precludes tying horses up to unhitched trailers.  
True or False?
  
10. Preemptive slaughter policies for Foreign Animal Disease outbreaks may require euthanasia of large numbers of livestock.  
True or False?
  
11. Guidelines for proper methods for euthanasia of livestock include veterinary, producer, and humane groups.  
True or False?
  
12. In most states Good Samaritan Laws do not directly apply to the care of animals.  
True or False?



**Learning Check**

13. When livestock are being transported, the driver should have information on the animals' owner.

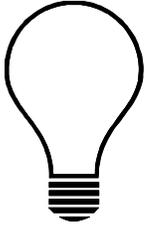
True or False?

14. One should use good judgment and restraint in discussing the nature of an accident and the condition of injured animals with others.

True or False?

15. It is not normal to feel stressed after experiencing euthanasia of animals in disasters.

True or False?



**Answers**

For every question that you answered incorrectly, review the page listed next to the answer to find out why your answer was incorrect.

1. True.....13-1
2. True.....13-1
3. True.....13-2
4. True.....13-2
5. True.....13-2
6. True.....13-3
7. False.....13-3
8. False.....13-3
9. True.....13-3
10. True.....13-5
11. True.....13-5
12. True.....13-6
13. True.....13-7
14. True.....13-8
15. False.....13-10

## **Summary**

This unit described methods that can help you transport horses and livestock safely. This unit also discussed euthanasia of animals and how Good Samaritan laws may in some cases apply to the care of animals.