

Tornado Preparation and Response in Feedlot Cattle



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KEYWORDS

• Emergency protocols • Disaster strike • Tornado • Natural disasters

KEY POINTS

- Encouraging operations to develop emergency protocols is one of the best steps one can take as a veterinarian who may be called upon to help once disaster strikes.
- Poor plans yield slow progress, and in times of tornado damage, efficiency in recovery is critical for an operation.
- A veterinarian is a key player in animal stewardship as well as human health and safety during natural disasters.

INTRODUCTION

Tornado Alley is a colloquial term given to the rough outlines in the central United States where tornado occurrences are disproportionately higher than in other regions. The alley overlies states like Texas, Nebraska, and Kansas, which are also the top 3 states with the highest cattle population in feedlots, respectively.^a This combination leads to emergency situations that occur on an annual basis, usually during late spring to early fall. When disasters like tornadoes strike, a plan and protocol are absolutely necessary in order to handle these situations as efficiently as possible. Beef producers need a leadership team that is equipped and prepared to delegate and lead solutions to all problems that arise in the wake of a tornado. And that is where a veterinarian comes in.

IMMEDIATE ASSESSMENT

In the first few hours after a tornado has hit, it is critical that the leadership team meets to discuss the initial triage plan. The leadership team would ideally be present on the

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^a <http://www.beefusa.org/beefindustrystatistics.aspx>.

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property in order to best assess the extent of damage both to animals and the facility itself. The team may consist of the feedlot owner, operation manager, veterinarian, nutritionist, attorney, insurance agent, and nutrient management professional. This list is not exhaustive and will need to be tailored to each different situation and feedlot. The key is to make sure the leadership team can address and develop plans for all areas affected by the tornado. Without a predesignated leadership team, immediate action will be delayed, and recovery efficiency may be affected.

In many cases, large numbers of volunteers will arrive to extend support and help. It is the author's experience that this work force can be of great value if the leadership team can effectively coordinate and lead the volunteer workforce. Alternatively, a large number of volunteers can create congestion and have a negative affect if they are not directed with a coordinated plan. Volunteers may be given tasks that are not necessarily animal-centered; therefore, cattle experience is not needed. Picking up debris throughout fields, for instance, can be designated to volunteers while feed crews and cowboy crews focus on other pressing matters related to their own expertise. It is important that the leadership team continually assess and address the risk for human safety.

Initially, depending on damage, the leadership team should determine if all animals are confined, and if not, what is the best way to confine to secure their safety as well as the general public? While the animal is being confined, an assessment can be made on animal health. The leadership team will want to develop a plan for euthanasia, treatment, relocation, and humane slaughter. Access to water and feed for animals will potentially be compromised; therefore, bringing in temporary water tanks and feed bunks may be needed during the first few days. The authors recommend that the leadership team comes together at least once a day to best streamline the response and keep recovery as efficient as possible. Conducting a team meeting once a day, ideally in the morning to update and prepare for the days' work ahead, is recommended to keep all employees and volunteers on the same page with the leadership team. There are many moving parts to recovery and repair of an operation that has been disabled by a tornado; these parts can quickly become disjointed without a smooth connection that keeps all parties involved and informed every day. Communication is an invaluable key in hectic situations like these and should not be a skipped step.

CREATE A PROTOCOL

Developing a protocol that is tailored to the operation is essential, although it might seem tedious. Having a game plan allows the team to be as prepared as possible if a catastrophic event occurs. A disaster plan may not be perfect depending on the event, but it will position the operation to address the situation proactively.

A good place to start when developing a protocol from the ground up is to figuratively go around the premises and determine what the actions would be if different pieces of the facility were compromised. For example, prearrange how to respond to no electricity that prevents the feed mill from operating, or decide where to treat cattle if the hospital pen or barn is destroyed. By doing this, it will help tailor a protocol to fit with each specific operation and its own unique layout and facilities.

Along with deciding what to do with physical damage to facilities, the protocol should outline decisions that have been predetermined for potential situations, like media control leadership. Determining a point person to control any and all information going to outside sources will help ensure there is only 1 outlet while allowing others to keep their attention fully on their own designated duties. Along with media control, the protocol should also include individuals or teams that are in charge of the immediate needs such as water and feed acquisition and its containment. One of the first steps

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