

Preparation and Response to Truck Accidents on Highways Involving Cattle



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KEYWORDS

- Cattle transportation • Emergency response • Standard operating procedures
- Accidents • Humane euthanasia

KEY POINTS

- Annually, in the United States, more than 50 million head of cattle are transported. The majority are transported via semitrailer.
- As the number of livestock transported via motor vehicle has increased, so has the number of accidents involving livestock transport. Most livestock transport accidents in the United States involved semitrailers carrying cattle.
- Before the Bovine Emergency Response Program, no standard operating procedures existed for accidents involving livestock transport in the United States.
- The Bovine Emergency Response Plan provides a framework for veterinarians, emergency responders, and law enforcement to better address accidents involving cattle transport.
- The plan includes standardized procedures and materials for veterinarians, dispatchers, and first responders in the areas of call assessment, scene arrival and evaluation, site containment and security, extraction of cattle from the trailer, relocation of cattle involved in the accident, convalescence, mortality disposal, righting of the transport vehicle, humane euthanasia, and debriefing.

INTRODUCTION

Annually, more than 50 million head of domestic and imported cattle and calves are marketed and transported for breeding, feeding, and slaughter in the United States. Nearly all of these cattle are transported via trucks and semitrailers known as pots (**Fig. 1**).

According to a 2007 news article, in a 7-year period, more than 400 livestock transport accidents were reported in the United States and Canada. Of these accidents,

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Fig. 1. A cattle pot.

56% involved cattle trucks. Of the 169 documented cattle truck accidents, 23% involved trucks hauling finished cattle to slaughter and 70% involved the transport of feeders and calves. Most of the accidents occurred in October, followed by November, August, April, and May. Despite the time of year, only 1% of the reports identify weather as a cause of the accident.^{1,2} The increase in accidents in these months coincides with the increases in movement of feeder cattle from farms and ranches through marketing facilities such as livestock auction markets to feedlot operations.

Animal health authorities, law enforcement, livestock industries, first responders, and livestock transport industries have long identified a need for standard operating procedures to address cattle transportation accidents. In 2011, the Bovine Emergency Response Program (BERP) was developed to address this need. The objectives of the Bovine Emergency Response Plan are: (1) to develop a framework that local veterinarians, law enforcement, first responders, and emergency management can use to more appropriately address accidents involving cattle transport vehicles. This framework is rigid enough to cover all of the critically needed areas but flexible enough to fit the needs of local municipalities; (2) to identify further educational materials and curriculum related to the project; and (3) to identify future funding needs related to the development and sustainability of the Bovine Emergency Response Plan and its associated educational materials and program. This article discusses the components of the BERP and how veterinarians can be involved in preparing for and responding to truck accidents involving cattle.

THE VETERINARIAN'S ROLE IN TRUCK ACCIDENTS ON HIGHWAYS

Veterinarians should be involved in developing the details of the BERP with their local first responders. Although the veterinarian plays many vital roles in the entire process, primary among them is providing expertise and oversight in the evaluation and care of the animals involved in the accident. Veterinarians will also benefit from being engaged in the entire process and developing relationships with first responders. The reciprocal is true for emergency management teams. Even in rural America, societal changes have resulted in less knowledge of animal behavior and overall situational

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