

SAFETY AROUND CALVING TIME



STOP AND THINK

S | A | F | E

SLURRY ANIMALS FALLS EQUIPMENT

Introduction

Farm incidents involving animals have killed 11 farmers in the last five years in Northern Ireland. Many more people have been seriously injured by animals and have been unable to work for months.

Although bulls are traditionally viewed as the most dangerous animal on the farm, attacks by cows and heifers around calving time are also very common.

Why cows and heifers can become more aggressive around calving time

- Hormone levels begin to increase in cows /heifers as they approach calving and they start to develop strong maternal instincts.
- These instincts can make the animal behave aggressively before, during and after calving and they may try to attack farmers, vets or anyone else entering the area where they are contained.
- Hormone levels continue to rise after birth and a previously 'quiet' cow may become fiercely protective of her calf.

Potentially dangerous work

The following work activities can put farmers at risk from aggressive cows/heifers around calving time:

- Bedding the calving pen;
- Assisting the cow/heifer during calving;
- Assisting the calf immediately after birth and helping it to suck;
- Dosing or tagging the calf; and
- Separating the calf from its mother.

Precautions for working safely

It is very easy to become focused on the job in hand and extreme care is required. Ideally the cow should be restrained before you enter the pen but this is not always possible. If you must enter the pen the following precautions are essential:

- Work out your escape route before you enter the pen;
- Stay vigilant and alert to the possibility of attack by the cow;
- Move slowly and calmly at all times;
- Never turn your back on a cow or get between a cow and her calf;
- Never place yourself in a corner or between a cow and the wall;
- Keep children and dogs away; and
- Try to have another person present to help.



What are good calving facilities?

Good calving pens are essential to help you work safely and there are some excellent systems available that can be added to your existing cattle house. The safest systems are designed to keep you separate from the cow/heifer as much as possible.

You should consider the following when installing or upgrading your calving facilities:

- Are the calving pens located in a quiet area to avoid unduly stressing the cow/heifer?
- Are there enough pens for the number of cows/heifers due to calve?
- Is there adequate space in the pens to minimise stress in the animals?
- Is there easy access to the pens to allow you to provide fresh bedding and food?
- Is there a headlock present to allow you to restrict the animal before entering the pen?
- Does the design allow you to move the animal towards the headlock by swinging the calving gate round without having to enter the same area as the cow?
- Is there a chain with a quick release latch to secure the calving gate when in use?
- Does the calving gate provide safe and easy access for veterinary treatments and procedures?
- Does the calving gate allow easy access for the calf to suck?
- When you are working with an animal does the design and layout protect you from cows/heifers in neighbouring pens?
- Have the pens been designed to allow you to quickly escape under, over, through or behind the bars to a place of safety?



A well designed calving pen with a headlock which can be operated from a distance and a long calving gate which spans the width of the pen giving the farmer a good level of protection. In this case the cow has been tempted into the headlock with a bucket of meal.

Using the calving gate



The farmer swings the calving gate round to move the cow towards the headlock. Note that the animal is restricted from escaping around the end of the gate into the farmer's area.



With the mother secured the farmer can work safely with the calf.



With the cow secured in the headlock the farmer fastens the gate with a chain.



The farmer demonstrates use of the 'internal' gate to allow easy access for veterinary treatments / procedures.

'Stop and Think' checklist

ALWAYS

- ✓ Make sure that handlers are competent;
- ✓ Be vigilant and watch out for any signs of aggression;
- ✓ Plan your escape route before carrying out the work;
- ✓ Work calmly and quietly to avoid stressing the animals;
- ✓ Consider the design of your existing calving facilities carefully and upgrade them if necessary with suitable headlocks and calving gates;
- ✓ Cull animals that show excessive levels of aggression as soon as possible;
- ✓ Keep children and dogs away when working with cows/heifers around calving time; and
- ✓ Try to have another person present to help.

NEVER

- Turn your back on an unsecured cow around calving;
- Position yourself between a cow and her calf; or
- Put an inexperienced handler or a child at risk.

REMEMBER

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE RISK FROM COWS AND HEIFERS AROUND CALVING TIME

PLANNING YOUR CALVING FACILITIES CAREFULLY COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

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