

Severe Weather Advice

During severe weather, although priority will be given to human needs, the welfare of animals is also important. Officials (Local Authorities and Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency) will monitor the situation closely in liaison with the RSPCA, NFU, and other organisations who play a role in assisting farmers and pet owners to protect the welfare of their animals.

Responsibilities

- Under the law an animal keeper has a duty of care to his animals and is required to take reasonable steps to protect their welfare and prevent suffering - the legal responsibility is with the animal's owner/keeper.
- Farmers are expected to take reasonable steps to address animal welfare contingency planning as part of their farm business planning where it is known or could be anticipated that livestock might be at risk during severe weather.
- Equine industry guidelines on welfare similarly require such business continuity plans.
- As a general principle, animals must not be left in circumstances where they're likely to suffer. If it is possible to take action, even if that action is killing by a veterinary surgeon or other legally competent person, then action should be taken.
- In an emergency Animal Health, Local Authorities, RSPCA and others will do what they can to provide advice, and to facilitate means to prevent or alleviate the suffering of animals.

Severe cold weather

Advice to Farmers

During periods of bad weather farmers will already be working to ensure livestock is protected from the severe weather and that food and water is available. Farmers will be best placed to identify and source feed and water for their animals, for example by co-operating with neighbours if supplies run short or access is difficult.

It is important to ensure that where animals are kept outside drinking water troughs are kept free of ice and that if pipes and water supply fittings are blocked water is taken to the animals regularly. If you face serious difficulties in sourcing supplies to protect the welfare of your animals, contact one of the organisations listed at the end of this page who will try and identify solutions in co-operation with each other. Local Authorities (County and unitary councils) have statutory responsibilities in relation to animal health and welfare on farms, at markets and in transport, and can provide further advice and support. In an emergency the RSPCA will also provide help and advice.

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Advice to pet and horse owners

Where pets (such as rabbits and guinea pigs) are normally kept outside in hutches during mild winters, owners should consider moving them into garages/sheds to provide additional thermal insulation. Where cages cannot be moved additional protection or insulation should be provided wherever possible. It is also important to ensure a supply of drinking water. Ice should be cleared from drinking water containers and thespouts should be defrosted regularly.

As with farmed livestock, horses and ponies usually kept outside during the winter should have access to shelter at all times and a regular provision of feed and water ensured. Where such provision is inadequate, owners should consider moving the animals and/or permanently stabling in the interim period. Water supplies for all horses and ponies should be checked regularly and alternatives sources supplied if mains failure occurs.

In an emergency you should contact the RSPCA for help and advice.

Live animal transport

Transporters are required by law not to transport animals in a way that is likely to cause injury or undue suffering. So in the current conditions transporters must check their intended route is safe and clear before any journey commences. If journeys do commence then drivers should have contingency plans to care for the animals in case of any problems encountered.

Bedding must be supplied for calves under 6 months, foals under 4 months, piglets under 10 kgs and lambs under 20kgs. This bedding must guarantee the animals comfort in the prevailing weather conditions. However, during freezing weather conditions, bedding is likely to be appropriate for older/heavier animals too.

For journeys over 8 hours, ventilation systems on vehicles must be capable of maintaining the temperature in the animal compartment above 0 degrees centigrade.

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Markets

It is a legal requirement that no one shall cause or permit injury or unnecessary suffering, whatever the cause (including severe weather), in a market. Water provision at markets is essential and where markets are unable to provide such alternative supplies in instances of mains delivery failure then markets should not proceed to accept animals for sale.

Where overnight lairaging occurs, the market operator should consider carefully whether the facilities are fit for use in extreme weather conditions and where necessary provide supplementary bedding, water, feed and protection from adverse weather conditions. Local Authorities and Animal Health will be monitoring carefully any market events that continue to proceed during this time and will be taking appropriate enforcement action where necessary.

Advice to slaughterhouse Food Business Operators

During periods of bad weather Food Business Operators (FBOs) need to ensure livestock is protected from the severe weather and that food and water is available if conditions cause routine operations to stop. FBOs will be best placed to identify and source feed and water for their animals or redirect the animals to a more suitable location or different slaughterhouse. Contingency plans should be developed in advance to facilitate co-operation with neighboring slaughterhouses / farms if supplies run short or access is difficult.

It is important to ensure that where animals are kept outside drinking water troughs etc. are kept free of ice and that if pipes and other water supply fittings are blocked water is taken to the animals regularly.

If you face serious difficulties in sourcing supplies to protect the welfare of your animals, contact your official veterinarian in the first instance and, where this is not possible and the welfare of the animals is compromised you may contact one of the organisations listed at the end of this page who will try and identify solutions in co-operation with each other. Local Authorities (County and unitary councils) have statutory responsibilities in relation to animal health and welfare on farms, at markets and in transport, and can provide further advice and support. In an emergency the RSPCA will also provide help and advice.

Hot Weather

Advice to Farmers

High temperatures and humidity, particularly sudden changes in conditions, can pose a major threat to animal welfare. The following basic advice is to help farmers, transporters, pet owners and others avoid problems.

There is a legal obligation on those looking after animals to avoid causing them unnecessary suffering, and to avoid subjecting them to conditions where this is likely to occur. It is an offence if the welfare of an animal is compromised as a result of a failure to take appropriate action in response to extremes of temperature.

Farmed animals should be provided with adequate shelter and protection in accordance with the law and welfare codes. In hot weather it is particularly important that animals have access to shade and water.

Livestock keepers should inspect their animals often and take necessary action to correct any problems.

Transporting animals

Those transporting animals, including agricultural animals, should take action to avoid problems in hot weather. Things to consider include (although this is not an exhaustive list):

- Factoring potential weather conditions into the planning of any journey (for example not loading or moving animals during the hottest parts of the day)
- Improved ventilation of the vehicle
- Increased space allowances
- Providing water and electrolytes more frequently

In addition, contingency plans should be in place for every journey, and are particularly important in hot conditions as delays, which might be relatively insignificant under normal conditions, can become critical very quickly.

Other Advice

Water Supplies

The interruption of water supplies can pose difficulties for some farmers in obtaining water for their animals. Farmers will often be best placed themselves to identify and source water for their animals, for example, co-operating with neighbours who may have bore holes. However if you face serious difficulties in obtaining supplies to protect the welfare of your animals during a weather related emergency, contact one of the organisations listed at the end of this page who will try and identify solutions in co-operation with each other.

The greatest risk to animals from lack of water is dehydration which can lead to suffering and death. To reduce this risk, try to provide water from one of the following sources (best to worst): potable water, collected rain water, reservoirs, rivers and streams, flood water. Seek advice from your own vet on the risks and whether animal treatment is advised.

For livestock, priority should be given to animals with no access to water of any sort. Young animals, housed animals on dry feed only and lactating animals will be at particular risk.

If only a restricted supply of potable water is available, the following is a rough guide to the daily needs of an animal:

- milking cows: 38 – 52 litre
- other cattle: 38 litre
- horse: 20 – 45 litre
- pig: 4 – 11.5 litre
- sheep: 6 litre
- poultry (intensive): 0.5 litres

(These figures will vary depending on the age of the animal and on temperature and humidity.)

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Where practicable, actions to reduce the requirement for water include:

- Reducing feed intake
- Drying off animals in late stage lactation
- Ending egg production

Where water is rationed, care is needed to avoid 'salt poisoning' in pigs.

Practical pointers:

- Talk to neighbouring farmers with possible local water supply from boreholes
- Grain trailers could be made water proof by siliconing the insides of the trailer, or by using builders polythene (not silage sheets as they are not strong enough) to provide additional storage for water on farms.

If water cannot be made available, farmers should consider whether animals can be transported to areas where supplies are available. As a last resort, in situations where water cannot be made available, farmers will need to consider euthanasia for their animals rather than allowing them to suffer.

Flooding

In flooded areas, water may be polluted with sewage, manure and chemicals and animals drinking such waters are at risk from infectious agents that can cause disease and scouring (diarrhoea) associated with intake of non-purified water. If animals in flooded areas have drunk flood water where they have been unable to use water troughs, treatment may be necessary, especially with young animals.

Sources of help and advice

- RSPCA can be contacted by calling – Telephone 0300 1234 999.
- NFU Members – Telephone 0870 845 8458
- County and Unitary Councils - all contact details can be found on the Directgov website.