

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

*Information guide – Rural industry***20. Cattle handling****Handlers**

- Develop a sound knowledge of animal behaviour and animal handling techniques.
- Plan ahead - consider safe work practices. Get assistance if necessary.
- Be suitably attired - wear protective footwear and a hat for protection from the sun.
- Make use of facilities and aids - headbails, branding cradles, drafting canes etc.
- Know the limitations of yourself and other people - work within those limitations.
- Respect cattle - they have the strength and speed to cause injury.
- Concentrate and be alert. Having a sound knowledge of animal behaviour will help you to anticipate animal reaction.

Facilities and conditions

- Handling facilities should be designed for the number and type of livestock and type of work you are doing.
- Good yard design assists the smooth flow of cattle. Well positioned gates, curved races and covered sides on loading facilities improve cattle movement.
- Keep facilities in good repair. Keep free of protruding nails, bolts, wire and rubbish.
- Ensure latches, bolts, chains etc. on gates are sufficient to contain stock and are kept in good condition.
- Where cattle need restraining, use crushes, headbails, cradles etc.

- Safety gates and/or well placed gaps in yard fences are important for a hasty retreat.
- Have a planned method of retreat in the event of threatening animal behaviour.
- Try to maintain yards in a non-slippery state.
- Cattle may be more unpredictable during unsettled or extreme weather conditions.

Consider the stock

- Safety in cattle handling varies according to a number of factors:
 - age, sex, breed and weight
 - horn status
 - temperament
 - animal training
 - behaviour of the handler.
- A period of intensive handling in yards and tailing-out as weaners can make subsequent handling of mature animals easier.
- Bulls are more aggressive when near cows in oestrus and extremely dangerous when fighting. Separate into different yards where applicable.
- Cows and heifers are more likely to charge when they have a young calf at foot.
- Isolated cattle often become stressed and likely to charge when approached, particularly in yards.
- Cattle with sharp horns are dangerous and dehorning is recommended where practicable. However, dehorned and polled cattle can still cause injury.

Consider the operation

- Avoid working in overstocked yards as you could be crushed or trampled.
- While drafting cattle through a gate, work from one side to avoid being knocked down by an animal trying to go through.
- When working with cattle in a crush to vaccinate, apply tail tags etc, take care not to crush arms against rails or posts from sudden stock movement.
- Approach cattle quietly and make sure they are aware of your presence.
- When closing a gate behind cattle in a crush or small yard, stand to one side in case the mob forces the gate back suddenly.
- To avoid injury from being kicked, attempt to work either outside the animal's kicking range or directly against the animal where the effect of being kicked will be minimised. In dairies, try to follow a regular routine so as not to alarm cows.
- If possible, operate at arms length when working at the head of an animal, for example, when inserting NLIS tags and dehorning. Even though the head is restrained in a head bail, cattle can still push forward and/or upwards suddenly. A chin bar or head holder will help restrict the animal's vertical head movement in the head bail.
- Care should be taken when using equipment, such as brands or knives for castrating and bangtailing, etc.
- Train stud cattle to accept intensive handling through gradual familiarisation – grooming, washing, clipping, etc.
- When leading cattle on a halter, never wrap the lead rope around your arm or hand. You could be dragged if the animal gets out of control.
- Bulls should be fitted with a nose ring. When being led, their heads should be held up by the nose lead.
- Be aware of the possibility of contracting diseases such as Leptospirosis and Q fever when working with animals. Leptospirosis is transmitted through contact with blood, tissue and urine. Q fever is transmitted through contact with placental tissue or inhaling dried dung.
- Vaccinating herds against Leptospirosis is recommended. A vaccine is also available to protect humans against contracting Q fever.

Safety in cattle handling depends upon the animal's behaviour and more importantly on the handler's behaviour. Be sure to:

- concentrate, be alert and take care
- keep facilities in good repair
- have a sound knowledge of animal behaviour and animal handling techniques
- wear appropriate clothing.

More information

Further information is available from www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or by calling the WHS Infoline on 1300 369 915.