

Veterinary Council of Ireland
Animal Welfare Guidelines for Managing Acutely Injured Livestock on Farm

Management of an acutely injured animal on farm frequently requires the involvement of a veterinary practitioner and written certification. The certificate is effectively an on farm ante mortem examination and a fitness to travel certificate and it becomes an integral part of the food safety chain.

The Veterinary Council of Ireland is concerned that all veterinary practitioners are not aware of best practice and relevant legislation in this area. For example the EU Food & Veterinary Office (FVO) reported after a 2006 visit:

"A significant number of cattle delivered from farms with Health Certificates signed by private veterinary surgeons were unfit for transport from the farm of origin and later diagnosed with bruises and fractured limbs."

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_id=1684]

Where treatment is not an option, there are three possible ways of managing an acutely injured animal on farm:

- 1 Transport of the live animal to a slaughterhouse.
- 2 Transport of the emergency slaughter animal to a slaughterhouse following emergency slaughter on site.
- 3 Slaughter and disposal of the emergency slaughter animal as fallen stock (knackery).

Having inspected the animal, evaluated the degree of injury and pain which the animal is suffering and, having considered the available options regarding transport and slaughter in the context of proximity of the slaughter outlet, availability of suitable transport vehicle and timelines involved, the veterinary practitioner must decide on the most appropriate action.

- Should options 1 or 2 above be considered, it is the responsibility of the owner or keeper to arrange a slaughterhouse to accept the animal. There is however no obligation on any slaughter premises to accept animals for emergency slaughter or for dressing following slaughter.
- Should it not be possible to find a slaughterhouse prepared to accept the animal or emergency slaughter animal without undue delay and, taking fully into account the welfare of the animal, then option 3 above must be taken.

In general if the transportation of an animal is LIKELY to cause further injury or unnecessary suffering, the animal must NOT be transported. In particular do not transport any animal, which cannot be loaded or unloaded without using force (e.g. unable to walk unassisted), or any animal with severe wounds or protruding viscera.

Where transport is authorised, animals should in all cases be transported to the nearest available slaughterhouse.

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Relevant legislation and further information.

Veterinary practitioners should be familiar with the current legislation in this area and should only certify using approved templates.

Council has engaged with other stakeholders, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Veterinary Ireland and the Local Authority Veterinary services to produce a presentation for clinical societies on this subject and all veterinary practitioners are encouraged to attend any such local meeting when available.

Legislation (not an exhaustive list)

The Protection of Animals Act 1911 and The Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1965
The Slaughter of Animals Act 1935
European Communities (Food and Feed Hygiene) Regulations 2005 (S.I. No. 432 of 2009)
European Communities (Animal Transport and Control Post) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 675 of 2006)
European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations 2008 (S.I. No 14 of 2008)
Abattoirs Act 1988 (Veterinary Examination and Health Mark) Regulations 2009 (S.I. No. 154 of 2009)

Information

FAWAC booklet "Animal Welfare Guidelines for Managing Acutely Injured Livestock on Farm"
http://www.fawac.ie/publications/AW_GuidelinesManagingAccutelyInjuredLivestock.pdf

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food www.agriculture.gov.ie

FAWAC www.fawac.ie

FVO www.ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/index_en.cfm