

Care and Treatment of Livestock after a Hurricane



Hurricanes can put livestock in immediate danger of drowning from flooding caused by heavy rains or storm surges in low-lying areas. In addition, flying debris or collapsing buildings can injure animals. Downed power lines can present electrocution hazards. After the hurricane, livestock seeking higher ground may wander onto roadways, creating additional hazards for themselves and motorists. Check perimeter fences along roadways for downed trees or missing water gaps.

As soon as it is safe, livestock owners should check on the condition of their animals. Be prepared to take feed, hay, water, basic livestock first aid supplies, and wire cutters and other tools. Be extremely careful when re-entering hurricane-affected areas because of debris, chemical spills and downed power lines. As soon as possible, move the animals out of any flooded areas and to dry or covered locations.

Check for injuries and render first aid as needed. Serious injuries will require veterinary attention. Be ready to provide some form of aid until the vet can arrive. Remember that veterinarians may have damage to their homes and buildings or livestock too, or they may have more urgent cases to handle first. When you call the veterinarian, be precise in describing the injury. Provide as much detail as possible including respiration, temperature and pulse rate. Offer to render any aid suggested. Don't forget to tell exactly where the animals are located or mention any road closures or bridges along the way.

Give stressed animals clean feed or hay and water. Provide animals that have not had access to feed for one or more days a little feed the first few days. Gradually increase it over a week to full feed. Animals should be allowed access to clean hay even if it is wet. Watch for signs of sickness. Pneumonia will most likely develop if the animals have been in water and cold. Listen for coughing, look for runny noses, crusty eyes, hard breathing and lowered heads. Get treatment for these animals as soon as possible.

Do not give wet or moldy feed to any animal. Wet hay, as long as it is not moldy, is good filler. Dry feed will be best for all classes of livestock. Remember to feed in moderation. Watch for fire ant infestations in the hay from flood areas. If you need hay, contact your local Texas AgriLife Extension county agent's office for a list of local suppliers. Or you can contact the Texas Department of Agriculture Hay Hot Line at 1-877-429-1998.

High water will cause snakes to seek higher ground as well. Rattlesnakes, water moccasins, and copperheads are the principal snakes affecting livestock since they can strike and envenomate quickly. Coral snakes are less of a problem since they have to bite more slowly to envenomate their victims. Usually animals are bitten on the head or neck area, but smaller livestock can be bitten anywhere the snake can reach. Smaller animals are more susceptible to snakebite since the dose of venom is greater relative to body size. When they are bitten on the head or neck, swelling can block airways and cause asphyxiation. If you suspect snakebite on a small animal, contact your veterinarian quickly. Spiders (particularly the Brown Recluse and the Black Widow) are also of concern, but mostly from a human standpoint. Most bites are not fatal to livestock.



External parasites, especially mosquitoes, will be a major problem. A number of commercial products are available for treatment of individual animals or small areas (foggers and sprays). However, for larger livestock, their only relief will be dry pastures with access to a good wind. Usually the larger livestock tolerate mosquitoes and biting flies even though it is not in their best interests to be afflicted. Some can transmit diseases, such as West Nile Virus in horses. The best defense is to ensure the animals are vaccinated against the major diseases (or boosted) as soon as possible. Ticks, especially the hard (or outside) ticks, will move to higher ground and onto more livestock. Several good commercial products are available and should be applied when possible because ticks can also transmit diseases like anaplasmosis.

Internal parasites may become an issue over time, especially if cattle from several sources are commingled and many pastures are flooded. This will not be an immediate problem due to the extended lifecycle of most of the internal parasites but may become a problem later. You should visit with your veterinarian about future treatment.

Water quality will also be an issue, especially for livestock in populated areas that drink from streams, bayous, and tanks that fill with rain runoff. This water could be contaminated with salt water from storm surges, petroleum products, dead animals, and fecal material from flooded septic tanks and sewer systems. If possible, water livestock from cleaner water sources until these can be evaluated.

If there are dead animals on your property, dispose of them properly if possible. Dead animals cannot be burned without permission of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, but this might be waived in the case of a natural disaster. Usually one or a few animals can be allowed to decompose above ground (if burial is not feasible) if they are not a human health hazard, do not obstruct traffic, and are not in a waterway or drainage area. If you do bury them, avoid ground that is within 50 feet of any water well.

These recommendations are just a partial list of actions that livestock owners should be aware of in a post-hurricane event and do not cover several species-specific concerns. Whenever possible, livestock owners should either evacuate their animals to a safe area or move them to high ground that has some protection from the wind and rain. Ideal are wooded or brushy areas where livestock have access to natural shelter, feed (or hay), and room to move to avoid flying objects. If animals (such as pigs) are housed in a confined space where escape is not possible, facilities should be evaluated for flooding hazards. Animals in these situations may need to be moved to another location. Livestock owners should have an inventory list of their animals, identification numbers (or pictures), and veterinary records. A first aid kit would help in preparing for the worst.

Texas livestock owners can find hurricane-related information on the Texas Extension Disaster and Emergency Network (EDEN) at <http://texashelp.tamu.edu/>. The EDEN website has pages for Hot Topics (current problems) and Disaster Information (preparedness and recovery), plus a full library of disaster resource information by topic.