

DEHORNING OF CATTLE BY CAUSTIC CHEMICAL AGENTS

Dehorning of cattle may be justified in terms of prevention of goring, bruising and even killing other cattle. However dehorning must be done using the right method, the right equipment, to the right class of animal and the right time of year, by operators who are correctly trained, know the risks and how to minimise them, and conduct the right follow-up procedures.

Dehorning by caustic agents poses a serious risk of damage to other parts of the body if the agent is not strictly confined to the horn. The caustic substance may run down from the point of application and damage eyes, ears and face. Rain and moisture may aid this spread and increase the risk. Animals may rub the treated area against objects or even other cattle and thus cause further damage. Using this method implies that only very young calves with small horn buds can be dehorned. For these reasons, using caustic substances is not the recommended method dehorning. In spite of its own limitations and risks, dehorning by hot iron after disbudding remains the preferred method on the grounds of animal welfare.

ELECTRO-IMMOBILISATION OF LIVESTOCK

Devices are available that immobilise livestock by passing a small electrical current through specifically placed electrodes and cause spasm in skeletal muscles. Immobilisation may be required to carry out certain procedures with safety to both the operator and animal, where untoward movement may cause pain or damage. Excessive current settings or inappropriate placement can cause distress, dyspnoea and even luxations or fractures and death. There is no anaesthesia or diminution of pain whatsoever that results from the use of these devices, and therefore they can never be used as a substitute for anaesthesia or to mask pain that should have been prevented by other means. The use of electro-immobilisers must be limited to those situations requiring immobilisation but not anaesthesia. Operators must be responsible persons (or under responsible supervision) who are aware of the dangers and limitations of these devices, must be fully trained and only use them in situations where they are justified. The device must be applied for the minimum appropriate time for any given procedure. The class and age of animal must be taken into account and only used on animals where this is appropriate and recommended.