



## Handling Cattle in Cattle Crates



### INCIDENT

In January 2006, a farm worker was killed when loading Charolais bulls into a cattle crate. A bull resisted being loaded, and either kicked or pushed a cattle crate partition gate violently into the worker, causing fatal head injuries.

### CIRCUMSTANCES

The young employee had been employed at a South Island station for two months, when he was assisting with relocating seven bulls by a tractor drawn cattle crate to paddocks at the other side of the station. The employee had some experience handling cattle, but not necessarily with loading bulls into cattle crates, and was being assisted by a volunteer who had worked at the station for many years, including experience with bulls.

The stock crate was a three deck, multi stock type that is permanently configured to transport cattle. The stock crate is divided into four equal sized compartments by three 1400mm long swinging gates that are mounted off 800 mm long partitions. These gates provide a safe area for persons in the crate when swung to the side of the crate. The two lower unused decks of the crate are stowed lengthways on the top deck, which leaves half of the crate with an open top and half with an area covered by the stowed decks. The gates require a reasonable force to locate in their locked position.

Earlier in the day the seven bulls were moved in a group without incident to the station's cattle pens. The employer discussed the loading of the bulls with the employee and the volunteer. The volunteer moved the first bull from the cattle pen and onto a loading ramp, where the employee took over and guided the bull up the loading ramp and into the cattle crate. He directed the bull into one of four pens in the crate without any mishap and secured the partition gate. The employee exited the cattle crate, by which time the volunteer had the second bull ready at the loading ramp. The employee – who had a cattle prod – guided the second bull up the loading ramp and into the stock crate.

While the volunteer was readying the third bull in the cattle pen, he heard noises coming from the crate. He called out to the employee but received no reply. He approached the crate and saw the second bull walking calmly back down the ramp. He found the employee inside the crate on the floor, unconscious, with serious head injuries. He died at the scene.

### INVESTIGATION

The Department of Labour's investigation for the coroner found that the employee was quite tall, and he would have needed to stoop when inside the crate pens. This would have put his head outside the designated "safe area" and in close proximity to the bull. It is assumed that the bull suddenly stopped before it got safely into its designated pen, and became agitated. The employee may have used the prod while standing behind the bull and on the other side of the pen's gate. It is believed that the bull then violently kicked his rear legs at the gate, which slammed into the employee, throwing him with considerable force against the crate's wall.

Charolais bulls are generally known to be gentle, but do not like restricted spaces. Bulls are also territorial, and the presence of another bull inside a restricted space may have caused the second bull distress particularly if the first bull was the more dominant of the two. If the employee was standing directly behind the bull, out of its field of vision, and had used the prod when it suddenly stopped, it is likely that the bull instinctively reacted by kicking back with its hind legs.

### DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ADVICE

It is the Department's advice that:

- screens should be installed between multiple cattle crate pens so that the animals cannot see each other
- handlers should not stand directly behind a bull as the bull cannot see them
- handlers should not stand in the bull's flight zone
- electric cattle prods are not safe to use on bulls, particularly in restricted areas, because an animal's reactions can be sudden and unexpected. They also impede a person's ability to act quickly
- inexperienced cattle handlers should leave the restricted area if they encounter difficulty and seek help
- handlers should be trained in the safe handling of large animals
- cattle crate design should factor in human safety as well as animal welfare requirements.
- whenever possible bulls should be handled in the order of least dominance particularly in confined spaces such as cattle pens and stock crates.

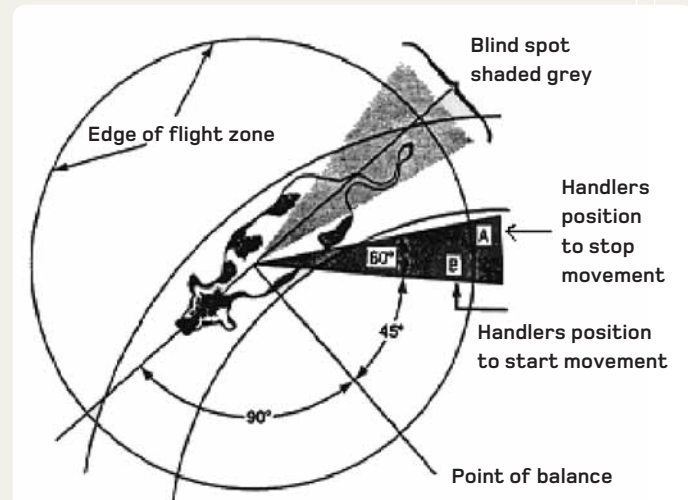
Further information on cattle handling safety is available from ACC at <http://www.acc.co.nz/publications/index.htm>.



## WHICH INDUSTRIES/SECTORS OR MATTERS WILL THIS INFORMATION BE RELEVANT TO?

Agriculture, livestock transport

*Note: This material has been prepared using the best information available to the Department of Labour at the time of publication. Information may change over time and it may be necessary for you to obtain an update. This material is also only intended to provide general advice and does not constitute legal advice. You should make your own judgement about action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with your workplace health and safety obligations under the law.*



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**Figure 1: Cattle's field of vision and flight zone.**

The location of eyes on large animals such as cattle provides them with excellent peripheral vision, however, they see a view with one eye only, which means that they judge distances poorly. To the rear, they have a blind spot where they can't see at all. If cattle detect movement to their side or rear, they become alarmed. Animals are calmer when the handler works on the edge of the flight zone. Standing inside the flight zone encourages the animal to move away from the handler.

(Reproduced from "Safe Handling of Large Animals (Cattle and Horses)" *Occupational Medicine: State of the Art Reviews* vol.14,2, April-June 1999).