



HELP STOP ON-FARM LEAD POISONING

Protect your livestock, business
and the UK's food



The problem

- More than half of on-farm incidents reported to the Food Standards Agency are caused by lead exposure and poisoning each year. These incidents put food safety at risk.
- In 2008, nearly 2,500 animals in Britain were restricted from the food chain, after 226 animals showed lead poisoning symptoms and 127 animals died.
- Lead poisoning kills. Cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry and some other animals can be affected. Cattle can die suddenly, become infertile or show signs of nervous disease and blindness.
- Exposure to lead can raise lead levels in meat, offal and milk above the limits laid down in food law, making it unsafe and illegal to go into the food chain.



Lead poisoning incidents increase in the spring when the animals are turned out.



UK cases of lead poisoning



Vehicle battery remains were accidentally mixed into animal feed on a Leicestershire farm. This resulted in the death of 26 of the 60 pregnant heifers and breeding cows in early 2006.

In March 2008, a group of 50 dairy cows on a Shropshire farm was affected by lead poisoning caused by grazing near a lead mine – 14 cows showed signs of lead poisoning and 6 died.

In August 2008, three lead batteries that had been fly-tipped caused several deaths in a group of 80 suckler cows and calves on a Midlands farm.

How can you save money?

Lead poisoning in livestock costs money:

- animal deaths, carcass disposal, veterinary fees
- slower or stunted animal growth
- increased birth defects and infertility
- loss of market value, decreased production



How can you avoid contaminated soil?

Some UK areas naturally have higher levels of lead in the soil – if these are used for grazing, introduce a 16-week withdrawal period before slaughter. Highly contaminated areas of land should not be used for grazing.

Keep animals safe:

- maintain sward that is dense and not too short
- don't allow land to be over-grazed
- don't allow animals to graze on waterlogged land
- fence-off bare areas of soil
- provide salt licks and mineral blocks
- flatten any molehills
- use a trough water supply, rather than natural pools of run-off water
- calibrate mowers to minimise soil uptake when making silage

How can you avoid lead contamination on your farm?

As a primary producer, you can play a crucial role in protecting the human food chain:



Check fields and barns regularly for vehicle batteries, burnt-out cars and old machinery.



Watch out for fly-tipping.



Check for flaky lead paint and putty.



Make sure animals can't access bonfire ash, piping and flashing.



Keep your animals' soil consumption as low as possible.

Other sources of lead include electric fencing batteries, lead shot and lead mining soil heaps.



If you suspect lead poisoning:

- **remove the cause immediately and stop access**
- **remove the livestock from the area**
- **seek veterinary advice**

Further information

Tests for lead in livestock, produce or soil are inexpensive and simple to arrange. For more information, contact your veterinary surgeon or regional Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) laboratory:

tel: 01932 357335

email: lab.testing@vla.defra.gsi.gov.uk

www.defra.gov.uk/vla/vla/vla_map.htm

Read about lead poisoning and how to prevent other on-farm incidents, such as botulism, on the Food Standards Agency website:

food.gov.uk/foodindustry/incidents/monitorprevent/prevent/farmers/

Food Standards Agency Incident Prevention Coordination Team:

tel: 020 7276 8735

email: IncidentPrevention@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk