Bovine Emergency Response Plan (BERP) Program

Description
Annually in the United States, billions of livestock are marketed and transported for breeding, feeding, exhibition, and slaughter. On any given day, several hundred thousand head of livestock are on the road. The transport of livestock is an integral and economically significant part of all livestock industries, especially in South Dakota where animal agriculture ranks number one and animal recreational activities are prevalent. South Dakota roadways are also common truck routes for the movement of livestock within North America. Accidents involving livestock have increased over the years and pose unique challenges to first responders, law enforcement, and the public. The national Bovine Emergency Response Plan (BERP) program trains first responders on recommendations to address local accidents involving livestock transport vehicles to protect their safety, public safety and animal well-being. Creating an awareness of the sensitivity of livestock transport accidents and enhancing the response by first responders can protect public safety and minimize potential impacts on the livestock industries overall from the incident or subsequent actions.

The one-day BERP curriculum covers dispatcher call taking, scene arrival and assessment, containment and security, animal handling, biosecurity, extraction of animals, relocation of animals, triage decision making for animals, euthanasia, mortality management, securing the wrecked transport vehicle, documentation needs, and debriefing. The course is presented through classroom lectures, tabletop exercises, and hands-on trainings. The ultimate goal of this course is to increase awareness for further training of first responders and law enforcement to handle incidents involving livestock transport vehicles and equip them with the tools to develop a comprehensive response plan at the local level.

Highlights or Impacts
In 2018, a condensed 2.5-hour BERP course was offered to Brookings EMS and fire and rescue teams upon request of the Brookings Fire Chief. Thirty-nine first responders participated. Based on feedback from this condensed course, SDSU Extension was invited to conduct full day-long courses at the 2019 South Dakota State Fire School. Two courses were offered and 16 firefighters and one youth were trained.

Participants of these trainings have begun writing local response plans and expanded discussions with their teams on their response to incidents involving livestock. Emergency managers and participants identified six counties with interest in hosting local BERP trainings. Participants completed surveys post-training that asked for knowledge level before and after participation for the various topics covered. All topics showed an increase in participant knowledge with the raw mean change for all topics being a 1.24 on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =
Low and 5 = High). Euthanasia and Mortality Issues had the largest increase in knowledge with a raw mean change of 1.73 and Debriefing and Safety had the least change in knowledge at 0.57.

Participant comments on the most important things learned that would help them in their job:
“Very insightful brought up many points that I would have not thought of, and I am a cattle producer.”

“Always a good refresher since it’s been many years since helping 4-H friends with show animals. Big difference between show & commercial.”

“How many different resources we need to get the job done.”

“The euthanasia process...Best practices of when and how to do it...The difference between killing and euthanasia.”

“Keep animals as calm as possible.”

“Having an understanding of what needs to be done in a livestock emergency that we are called to.”

“Need to pre plan, put your team together early.”

“The ‘Animal Transport Incident Assessment’ form looks very useful for fire department personnel to manage a scene. I like the checkbox format and the information it covers.”

“The list of names we need to make our contacts list.”

“Where the structural supports are on a cattle pot, that they typically end up on their right side, the roof is a good place to cut.”

“I had never moved any livestock.”

“The biosecurity risk factors are similar to hospitals and biohazards.”

“Proper way to euthanize an animal.”

“Go home safe.”

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