



# Barn Safety

Laurie Chapman-Bosco, Drew Conroy and Dwight Barney  
Faculty, UNH, Thompson School

Working with your animals can be a rewarding experience, but it can also be dangerous, for both you and your animal. However you can take steps to minimize the risks. Your barn should be safe enough that if an animal gets out, it would not be hurt. It should be organized enough so a neighbor could come in during an emergency and at least feed your animals.



## Barn Layout/Organization

Regardless of what type of animals your facilities house, they should be kept neat and clean. Water hoses should be coiled and hung off the floor. All wiring should be done to national code and needs to be out of reach of inquisitive animals. Tools should be hung neatly as this saves them from excess wear and tear, you'll be able to find them quickly when they are needed and most importantly, if an animal gets out it won't be injured by any loose tools.

Stall walls should be smooth and free of projecting nails. Stall cards and emergency information should be posted clearly and neatly. Stall cards at each stall or pen should include the animal's name, information about its physical appearance, any allergies, vices, special needs and how much feed it gets. Emergency information should be posted in a couple of places and include where you can be reached during the day, phone numbers of the veterinarian, farrier and feed store.

Pens for livestock should provide adequate ventilation, be draft free and provide shade on sunny days. There should be enough room at the feed rack so all animals can eat adequately. There should be a source of clean fresh water at all times. The pen should be clear of nails and other pointed objects. Have gates low enough so animals won't go under and have adequate door width so animals aren't squeezed or bumped going in or out.

Horse stalls should be fitted with at least one tie ring, a removable feed tub (for ease of cleaning) and a spot for two water buckets on the aisle wall (for ease of filling). Doors to the stall should either slide or open out, so if an animal were cast (stuck up against the wall), it could be easily helped. Doors should be at least four feet wide so horses' hips aren't hit as they go through.

An animal's living area should be clean, dry, light and well ventilated. It should provide enough room for the animal to get up and lie down easily. It is also best for the animal if they can scratch and clean themselves. Generally box stalls work well for many types of farm animals, but they require more bedding and time for cleaning, compared to other housing systems. The pen should also be free of any hazards such as sharp, protruding nails, places the animal could get stuck, or areas they could break windows or jump out of the pen and get stuck.

Farm implements and farm machinery should be stored away from animals, and out of people's paths. Gasoline, oils and other fuels should be stored in appropriate containers, out of the feed and animal areas.

Always follow equipment safety procedures. Don't let anyone ride on tractors, trailers, or other equipment not designed for that purpose.

## Grain, Hay and Medication Storage

Grain and hay should be stored in a room with a door, and the door closed, except during feeding. Grain should be stored in a feed bin or a garbage can instead of being fed out of the bag. The bags shouldn't be kept on the floor as condensation will turn the grain moldy.

If you don't have a separate room to store the grain then it should be kept in a garbage can with the lid chained or tied down with a bungee cord. The purpose is to prevent a loose animal from feasting on grain and it will prevent an overpopulation of rodents in the barn. Hay should be stacked on a pallet. Storage on the ground will allow it to mold and you'll lose it.

All animal medications should be stored in a clearly marked cabinet with a closed door, out of reach of small children and animals. A locked cabinet is preferred. Poisons should be labeled and kept in original containers. Never store hazardous substances in milk jugs, soda bottles, etc. All medications should be administered according to the manufacturer/veterinarian's instructions.



## Fire Prevention and Safety

Barn fires can be devastating and get out of control in a few seconds. Fire prevention is very important when considering the safety of your animals and yourself. You should have a fire extinguisher where you can reach it in an emergency. If you have a large barn, extinguishers should be placed every 75 feet. Extinguishers are rated according to how the fire was started. You need an ABC fire extinguisher, which puts out all types of fires (wood, electrical and hazardous chemical). Learn to read the gauge to determine if your extinguisher is properly charged. You may have to take it to your local fire department to have it recharged.

Other fire prevention measures are no smoking signs, removal of cobwebs from ceilings and walls, storing hay away from heat and light sources, covering light bulbs with protective covers, keeping the barn floor swept, and installing lighting rods. Hay is extremely combustible and should be stored in a separate building whenever possible. You should always make sure the hay is properly cured and stored dry. Wet hay produces heat and may catch on fire by itself (spontaneous combustion).

Other combustible materials (extra bedding) should be kept in a separate building and extra items moved from the middle of aisles so if animals must be rescued, there would be

nothing blocking the way. Fields around the barn should be maintained and kept mowed, since dried grasses can act as kindling.

You need to develop and practice an escape plan to use in case of fire. Halters should be on animals or readily available to lead them from a burning building. Lead lines should be readily accessible. Your fire station phone number should be at the phone for fast reference along with directions written on how to reach the farm. People don't always think clearly enough to give good directions when faced with a fire.

You should decide where you would put your animals if you were able to rescue them. Horses have been known to rush back into a burning barn because their stall represents security. Rescued animals need to be safely penned to prevent that from happening.

## Safe Animal Handling

Wear appropriate clothing while handling animals. Footwear should be sturdy, with a thick soled, enclosed shoe. The best footwear in a barn is a boot that at least covers your ankle; steel toes can help if an animal steps on you. Wear well-fitted clothing, as very loose clothing can be dangerous if it gets caught in equipment. Gloves can save your hands from blisters and protect you from serious rope burns.

Animals are penned up or restrained in order to control their behavior, but realize that without companionship or access to the outdoors they may try to destroy their living area. Most farm animals are very curious so beware of this trait and the dangers associated with it. Animals have been known to do many things we would consider strange, but the injuries they sustain or inflict on themselves can usually be traced to problems with handling or housing systems.

Large farm animals, when mature can out weigh their handlers by as much as 20 times. Never put yourself in a position where you can be squeezed or crushed by an animal. Animals can easily injure a handler as they rush for feed or squeeze through a door. They can also injure a handler by jumping on them, kicking or butting them. An animal must be taught to respect its handler and realize that they can't push, pull or in any other way upset their handler.

Any animal with horns has to be given a certain amount of respect. You shouldn't be afraid of the animal, and the animal shouldn't ever be allowed to intimidate you with its horns. Don't ever tease an animal by pushing on its head or grabbing its horns. Horns can be very dangerous, even if the animal isn't trying to use them defensively but only to lift its head or look to the side quickly. They can easily injure an unsuspecting handler.

## Conclusion

Common sense, patience and attention to the safety recommendations in this document will go a long way to keep you and your animals safe and healthy. If you are careful and always on the lookout for possible dangers, you will enjoy your animals and you will be much more likely to find success in your endeavors!

*Visit our website: [ceinfo.unh.edu](http://ceinfo.unh.edu)*

UNH Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer,  
UNH, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and NH counties cooperating.