



HELP STOP ON-FARM LEAD POISONING

Protect your livestock, business
and the UK's food



FOOD
STANDARDS
AGENCY
NORTHERN
IRELAND

The problem

- More than half of on-farm food safety incidents reported to the Food Standards Agency are caused by lead poisoning each year. These incidents put food safety at risk.
- In 2008, 2,500 animals in the UK 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



In Northern Ireland, a calf with symptoms of lead poisoning had high lead levels in the kidneys at post mortem. Checks by the herd owner confirmed the presence of car batteries in one corner of a field where 25 cows and calves were grazing. The cows were seen licking the batteries.

An 18-month old bullock in Northern Ireland was presented for post mortem, having shown nervous signs. Elevated lead levels were detected in this animal and in other cattle from a batch of 22. A lead battery was later found where cattle grazed.

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.

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



Sources of lead contamination

- > car batteries
- > burnt-out cars
- > bonfire ash
- > lead flashing
- > flaky lead paint
- > lead shot

Some areas in the UK can have high levels of naturally occurring lead in the soil (geochemical lead). Northern Ireland only has a very small area of land affected with geochemical lead – it is extremely unlikely that lead poisoning would occur from such sources.

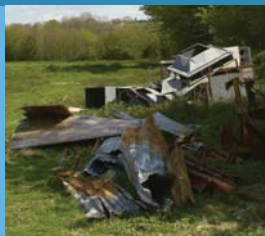


How can you avoid lead contamination on your farm?

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.



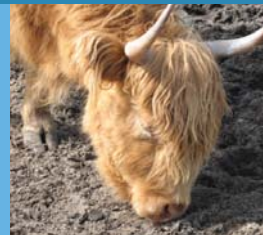
Watch out for fly-tipping.



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 AFBI Veterinary Sciences Division.

AFBI Veterinary Sciences Division, Stormont, Belfast

- Diagnostic Unit (non-carcase submissions)

tel: (028) 9052 5649

- Post-mortem Reception (carcase submissions)

tel: (028) 9052 5618

AFBI Veterinary Sciences Division, Omagh, Co. Tyrone

tel: (028) 8224 3337

www.afbini.gov.uk

email: info@afbini.gov.uk

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/](https://www.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