

# Implementing a Down Cow SOP

Professional Services Veterinarian Department Technical Bulletin



## What is the importance of a Down Cow SOP?

In today's modern dairy facilities, occasionally there will be a down cow that will not be able to rise and walk. Many reasons can cause a cow to go down, ranging from disease and injury, to a simple slip on the concrete.

It is important to take a proactive approach in handling a down cow situation. Devising a Down Cow Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and naming a Down Cow Team goes a long way in getting the cow up and back to production quickly and humanely.

## The 3 A's of Implementing a Down Cow SOP

1. **Attitude** "Stay Positive"
2. **Approach** "Build the Team"
3. **Application** "Establish and Follow SOP's"

### *Attitude*

Everyone involved with handling the animals, must manage their frustrations, which should start at the top with the owner/manager. Keep in mind that it is more than she just **doesn't** want to get up, she is **unable** to get up because she is either sick or injured. Maintaining a positive attitude during the whole process of working with the down cow will help set a positive standard for all employees.

Establish a **Standards of Care** (guidelines for the farm on how you expect your animals to be treated).

- All employees not affiliated with the Down Cow Team will need to leave the immediate area.
- Members of the Down Cow Team will not verbally insult or cuss at the cow.
- Members of the Down Cow Team will not strike the down cow with any object.
- Members of the Down Cow Team will not drag the down cow by the head or any limb with heavy equipment (except in circumstances specifically outlined in a Down Cow Team SOP).
- Members of the Down Cow Team will treat the cow with dignity and respect at all times.
- Members of the Down Cow Team will acknowledge that the reason for this team is to safely and humanely move the down cow to an area where she can be given the proper care to facilitate her return to production.



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## The 3 A's of Implementing a Down Cow SOP (Cont'd)

### Approach

Have in place a process for all employees to follow if they come upon a down cow.

#### Initial Steps for an employee upon reaching a down cow:

- Confirm adequate traction provided
- Apply pressure with knees to cows backside or ribs
- Open handed slap on topline
- If cow attempts to stand, position yourself at rear of cow to help stabilize by supporting her tail
- If no success, direct the shift manager to notify the down cow team leader

#### Choosing a Down Cow Team:

- Four individuals for each shift
- Should include shift supervisor/manager
- Should be long term employees (been with the company for over a year)
- One member should have rudimentary diagnostic ability
- All should demonstrate the ability to remain calm under pressure



#### Understanding "Five M's" to assess the situation:

- Metabolic
  - Milk Fever - *Low blood calcium causing a cow to become weak and recumbent.*
  - Hypophosphatemia - *Low blood levels of phosphorous that cause a cow to become weak or recumbent.*
  - Ketosis - *Negative energy state most common in fresh cows; can cause cow to go down.*
- Metritis - *Fresh cows can develop a uterine infection that can cause a cow to become recumbent.*
- Mastitis - *Cows at any stage of lactation may contract bacterial mastitis, which can cause a cow to become recumbent.*
- Massive Peritonitis - *Cows at any stage of lactation may develop an infection in their peritoneal cavity. This is usually associated with uterine trauma but can also occur at any time due to a perforated gastric ulcer or case of hardware disease.*
- Musculoskeletal Injury - *There are many different causes of musculoskeletal injury, including a cow doing the splits on concrete and a cow in heat jumping onto another cow causing injury.*

### Application

The following are items to consider while creating your Down Cow SOP (some may not apply to your operation). For proper implementation of these, training of staff by your veterinarian is the key to success.

- Proper use of Hip Hoist
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Using a Sled
- Moving a Recumbent Cow by Means of Mechanical Conveyance
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Out of the Main Parlor
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Out of the Main Return Alley
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Out of the Main Return Alley Sorting Lane
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Out of the Hospital Parlor
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Out of the Hospital Parlor Return Alley
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Out of the Loading Lane for the Hoof Chute
- Moving a Recumbent Cow Out of a Stall (Cow Facing Forward)
- Removing a Cow from the Manure Pit
- Removing a Dead Cow
- Humane Euthanasia (The Last Resort)

#### For a Down Cow SOP Example:

Contact:  
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