



## Caring for livestock after a wildfire

Like humans, livestock also face health risks from wildfires. Animals suffering pain, shock and long-lasting complications from burns or inhaling smoke particles are concerns for livestock owners.

### Prepare for wildfires

- Establish a livestock evacuation plan.
- Limit exercise. Don't force livestock to perform strenuous activities that put stress on their lungs.
- Provide plenty of fresh water. Keep water near feeding areas. Drinking maintains moist airways and helps breathing. This allows the windpipe and large and small airways to remove smoke particles and prevent disease.
- Sprinkle or mist livestock holding areas and provide low-dust or dust-free feeds. This limits dust exposure and reduces particulate matter.
- Provide recovery time. Airway damage from wildfire smoke can take several weeks. Allow livestock time to recuperate. Handling or transporting animals can worsen their condition.

### Work with your livestock veterinarian to help you triage

- Severely burned animals experiencing skin damage and shock may need to be euthanized. Emergency euthanasia options include captive bolt gun, firearm gunshot (laws and regulations may apply), or barbiturate overdose from a veterinarian.
- Burned areas of skin become leather-like and slough off in the first weeks post-burn. Keep wounds clean while maintaining minimal contact.
- Keep track of feeding habits. Not eating, or going off-feed, is an indicator of possible pain or sickness.
- Pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs) can occur. Livestock that has inhaled hot gases may have a cough and frothy material discharging from the nose. If you see these symptoms in your animals, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- Examine animals carefully. The depth and severity of burns may be difficult to see, especially if the animal does not appear pained. It is possible for burns to destroy nerve endings, meaning the animal may not show signs of pain despite severe tissue damage.
- Check animals' progress daily. Burn injuries may worsen for up to six weeks following injury.



Photo: bigbendnow.com

**Daily reassessment of each and every burned animal is extremely important.**

**The condition of an animal that has been burned or exposed to smoke can change drastically in the days and weeks following a wildfire. Some damage might not be evident upon initial inspection.**

**Please consult with your veterinarian to discuss pain relief options.**



Photo: Butte fire - Adam DuBrow/FEMA

## Document livestock and crop losses

- WSDA does not have a fire relief fund, however, federal assistance related to wildfire losses may be available, so document losses to crops and livestock. More information is available from your local extension agent or USDA Farm Services Agency office. Visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov) for information on their assistance programs.
- If you suffer livestock losses, document where they are found and photograph dead livestock where they lay. This will help with claims for assistance.

## Livestock identification

- The [WSDA Livestock Inspection Program](#) can help farmers and ranchers through brand inspection or ear tag identification if you need to identify livestock lost to a disaster. You can email [LivestockID@agr.wa.gov](mailto:LivestockID@agr.wa.gov) for help or visit our website, [agr.wa.gov](https://agr.wa.gov), and search for the Livestock Inspection Program.

## Dispose of livestock mortalities appropriately

Disposal methods approved by WSDA, the Washington State Department of Ecology, the Washington Board of Health and local public health districts include:

- **Direct burial of carcasses** — appropriate for small numbers of carcasses.
- **Composting** — must be conducted in compliance with chapter 70.95 RCW and chapter 173-350 WAC.
- **Incineration** — animal mortalities and byproducts can be incinerated in incinerator or cremation unit permitted by regional Clean Air Agencies.
- **Rendering** — Carcasses may be rendered only by a rendering plant licensed under chapter 16.68 RCW.
- **Landfill** — certain landfills are allowed to take carcasses as well as butchering waste.

**Open Burning** of animal carcasses and byproducts is not allowed under RCW 70.94.775.

If you have experienced large numbers of mortalities and need help preparing for disposal or finding a location to dispose of your animals, contact the Animal Health Line at (360) 902-1878.

