Employees removing animal carcasses from the highway right-of-way (ROW) must be aware of the need to protect themselves, co-workers and others against potential exposure to, and inadvertent spread of infectious agents. Careless handling of animal carcasses can create potentially harmful exposure to serious diseases such as rabies and Lyme disease, and infections from salmonella, e-coli and other pathogens. Improper disposal of carcasses and failure to properly disinfect tools, vehicles, and equipment may also infect co-workers, as well as potentially spread disease to the general public and wildlife population. By following established work practices, wearing appropriate personal protective equipment, practicing good personal hygiene, and exercising good judgment, employees can safely handle animal carcasses.

**BACKGROUND**

The Department responds to approximately 25,000 dead deer and countless other small animals in the ROW annually. It's often Residency practice to limit removal to larger animals, where public safety is a concern. In many cases, a Residency may refer callers reporting small animal carcasses to the local animal control officer, who is better equipped and trained to handle smaller animals more likely to be rabid. Carcasses that must be removed shall be handled in a manner that protects workers and the public and assures proper disposal. With increasing land development and more stringent environmental regulations, disposal in many wooded areas is often no longer feasible/legal.

Rabies is a virus that is found in the body fluid of an infected warm-blooded animal. The rabies virus can survive for long periods of time in the carcass of a dead animal. For this reason, consider all animals as infected and use proper procedures to avoid becoming infected.

If you think that you have been exposed to infectious material from an animal, **DO NOT** dispose of the carcass. Call the County Health Department or NYS Department of Health and seek medical attention. See below for contact information for county health departments: [http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/contact.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/contact.htm)
SAFE WORK PRACTICES

Employees should receive training in the proper handling and disposal of carcasses, and be guided by the following information and precautions.

Handling Animal Carcasses

- Confirm the animal is dead by prodding with a long-handled tool. Startling an injured, apparently lifeless animal, can increase potential for contamination or personal injury.
- Animals injured or dying, or exhibiting abnormal behavior, should be reported to police.
- Numerous dead or diseased animals (or birds) in one location should be reported to supervision and environmental staff, and may warrant contacting other agencies (NYSDEC, NYS or County Health Department).
- When proper disposal can not be achieved immediately, animal carcasses should be removed from the pavement or shoulder and left in a location in the ROW that does not create public exposure.
- When animal carcasses are transported for disposal, care shall be taken to contain body fluids during transport as follows:
  - Small carcasses should be picked up by inverting heavy doubled plastic bags over a leg or the tail, and pulling the bags (with bag between carcass and gloved hand) over the carcass as it is lifted. A shovel or other tool may be used to lift and push the carcass into the bags. Small animals intended to be composted shall be removed from plastic bags, and the bags disposed of properly.
  - Deer and other large carcasses should be placed on plastic sheets in the truck bed for transport to the disposal site (vs. bagging) or in leak-proof containers, or trucks with bed liners, to contain fluids. Wood chips may be used to help absorb body fluids.
  - Avoid throwing animals into the truck bed to minimize splash.
  - If animal body fluids contact your skin, wash the area with soap and water immediately.
- All tools used for handling dead animals shall be dedicated to this purpose and clearly marked, or shall be disinfected prior to other use. Avoid puncturing the carcass with the sharp edges of shovels and other tools used to remove and transfer dead animals.
- Contaminated disposable coveralls and plastic bags or sheets shall be properly discarded in tightly sealed double plastic bags, and placed in a proper solid-waste receptacle/location. Reasonable effort shall be made to disinfect the vehicle and tools after transport. Washing the vehicle bed and tools with a 10% household bleach solution is recommended. Vehicles should dry thoroughly before other use.
- Low trailers or vehicles with power tailgates, lifting devices, ramps, or other devices to minimize lifting-related injuries should be used.

If there are any questions, or need for additional information, the Regional Safety Representative should be contacted.

REFERENCES

TRANSPORTATION MAINTENANCE ENVIRONMENTAL HANDBOOK: