

After the STORM

Debris in pastures poses
potential health risk
to cattle.

by *Oklahoma Cooperative
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Insulation and building debris present in pastures after high winds can cause problems for cattle producers, difficulties that potentially may have a significant effect on animal health and time management costs.

Cattle will eat just about anything that looks interesting in the pasture, cautions Dave Sparks, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service veterinarian and area food animal quality and health specialist.

“Producers are going to have to pick up as much debris from their pastures as possible,” he says. “This can be a painstaking, labor-intensive process given the potential amount of small debris.”

Insulation can cause bloat; impaction; and gastrointestinal problems, including possible hemorrhaging of the rumen, when consumed. Nails and other small pieces of metal can cause “hardware” disease, health problems associated with the consumption of metal.

Sparks says a single piece of wire consumed by a bull, cow, heifer or calf can drop down into the reticulum, the first stomach, where it potentially can pierce the heart.

Other problems sometimes associated with hardware disease are the shutting down of the rumen, depression, acute pain and decreased milk production.

“Cattle producers may want to use rumen magnets if there appears to be a significant amount of metal debris in pastures,” Sparks says. “A rumen magnet may be a health-care investment well worth the money.”

Local large-animal veterinarians have information on rumen magnets, including associated costs and availability.

“Insulation debris is more problematic, because of the small size,” Sparks says. “Producers are unlikely to rid their pastures of every bit of insulation. If animals exhibit symptoms of insulation-related problems, producers should contact their local veterinarians immediately.”

Treatment of cattle suffering from insulation problems is symptomatic.

“Your local veterinarian will treat on a case-by-case basis,” Sparks says. “This might mean employing a treatment with laxatives, mineral oil, fluid therapy, or, in appropriate cases, surgery.”

Nails and other sharp metal objects of various sizes also create a significant hazard to the feet and legs of animals.

“It’s very common for these objects to cause puncture wounds and cuts in the feet and legs of livestock,” Sparks says.

Often, these metal objects have been carried by wind or washed into water holes,

ponds or other areas accessible to livestock and are a potential source of injury.

“It’s prudent for livestock owners to keep this in mind when they have animals showing lameness,” Sparks says. “If an animal is lame for more than one or two days and the lameness continues to worsen, it should be examined by a veterinarian.”

Additional information on after-the-storm cleanup practices is available through all Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension county offices at <http://countyext2.okstate.edu>.

