

Animal Behavior and Restraint:

Swine



During animal health emergency situations involving swine, tasks requiring the handling and restraint of the animals are likely. Having a basic understanding of swine behavior will allow for more effective efforts, thereby minimizing stress on the animals and reducing the risk of injury to responders.

Swine Behavior

- Swine are gregarious and social animals.
 - They have a natural tendency to follow each other and maintain visual or body contact.
 - Isolation from a social group is very stressful for pigs
- They will establish a social order, with one animal becoming the dominant individual for the group.
 - If a pig is removed or added, the group will fight to re-establish social order
- Swine have an inquisitive nature and spend much of their time in forage-related activities, such as rooting, grazing and exploring with their snout.
 - They like to chew on objects, including each other's ears or tails at times.
- Pigs are unable to sweat and are therefore very susceptible to hot temperatures or conditions. Avoid handling animals under these conditions.
- Pigs have a strong natural urge to escape.
 - Small gaps between pens, alleys, ramps, side gates, chutes, may encourage a pig to escape
 - During these escape attempts, pigs frequently injure themselves
- Swine prefer lighted areas, opposed to darkness; this can be used to encourage movement (e.g., facilitate loading).

Swine Handling

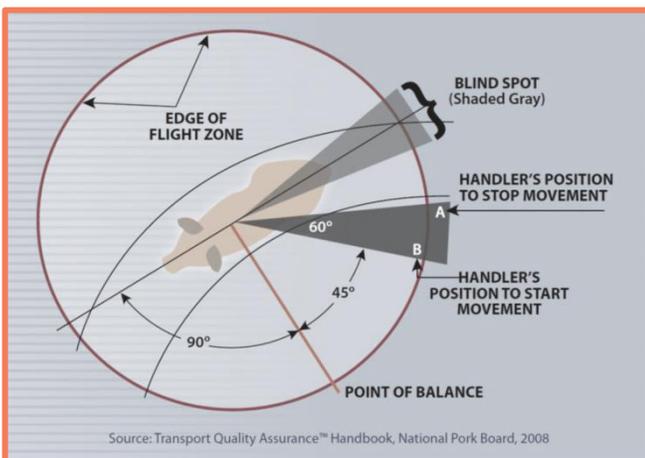
- Proper animal handling plays a key role in the health and welfare of the pig. Animal handlers should be trained to use behavioral principles of handling such as flight zone and point of balance.
- Pigs will grunt or bark when agitated and may squeal loudly when restrained or frightened.
 - Hearing protection should be used
- Avoid: Abuse, loud noises, yelling, isolating animals and distractions

- Use slow, deliberate movements
- Allow animals to walk at their own pace
- Non-slip flooring is critical
- Primary movement aids may be helpful:
 - Flags, plastic paddles, panels
 - Frequent electric prod use is detrimental
 - Do not kick the pigs or use sticks/prods to directly hit the pigs.
- Minimize or avoid distractions, such as shadows, reflections, moving objects, air drafts, people, other noises
- Piglets
 - Pick up by hind leg and carry
 - Avoid swinging
 - Support their chest, if moving a distance
 - Alternative: Place piglet over forearm with piglet's chest in palm, legs hanging on either side of arm
 - Never pick up by the ear
 - When setting animal down, lower it gently, front legs first
 - Piglets can also be herded using noise shakers or pig sorting board and flight zone principles
- Grower/Finisher (50-250 pounds)
 - Handlers should work in pairs
 - Move animals in small groups (5 or 6 pigs)
 - Utilize flight zone principles
 - Use sorting boards to turn or stop pigs
 - Watch for fatigue
 - Open mouthed breathing
 - Inability to move
 - Splotchy skin
- Male pigs/boars
 - Require extra precautions; animals can be quite aggressive
 - Move or load individually
 - Pen separately to prevent fighting injuries
- Sows
 - Often older and large in size; will require extra time for movement
 - Only move 2 or 3 sows at a time.
 - Increased aggression during estrus or at/near farrowing; be aware of where sows are in their reproductive cycle; handle cautiously.

Flight Zone

Understanding an animal's flight zone makes handling much easier. The flight zone is the animal's personal space. The size of an individual's flight zone is determined by their tameness and their level of excitement or stress.

- Swine have a panoramic (310°) range of vision.
- The blind spot is directly behind the animal (see light gray below). This area should be avoided.
- The ideal location for the handler is between positions A and B on the edge of the flight zone.
- To move the animal forward, enter the flight zone behind the "point of balance" or shoulder.
- Work at a 45-60° angle behind the animal's shoulder, moving back and forth parallel to the direction you want the animal to move.
 - Move toward B to start the movement.



- Move to A to stop the animal's movement.
- If a handler walks deep into the flight zone, swine will have a tendency to move in a direction opposite of the handler's movement
 - An animal will usually move forward if the handler moves from the head toward the rear
 - To move the animal backwards, the handler should move in front of the point of balance
 - Sudden, deep invasion of the flight zone may cause the animal to panic.

Methods of Restraint

- Restraint of swine may be necessary for tasks such as blood collection, vaccination or in some instances euthanasia.
- Before restraining pigs, ensure that the work area is large enough to perform the task safely, but small enough to restrict the pigs' movement.

Pig Sorting Board

- Apply gentle pressure with a pig sorting board (or your leg) to the pig's hindquarters and flank
- Perform the required procedure as quickly as possible, and return them to their pen promptly.

Restraining Snare

- Only used when absolutely necessary, and if task requires significant period of time
- Requires properly trained, competent handler
 - Place loop in mouth, over top jaw/snout
 - Hold snare handle vertically
 - Move loop back before tightening
 - Release pig as soon as possible
 - **Do not** restrain for prolonged periods of time
 - **Do not** move pig with snare
 - **Do not** tie pig up with snare

Things to Avoid to Prevent Injury

- **Separating sows and piglets** – Sows may become aggressive when piglets are removed; use care when reaching into the pen.
- **Sudden movements in the blind spot** – This can cause the animal to panic and run away, possibly causing injury to the animal or handler.
- **Cornering isolated animals** – Swine become nervous when separated from the herd. Cornering will increase the stress on the animal.
- **Distractions while trying to move cattle** – Patches of light and dark, loud noises, air drafts, can cause animals to panic, or balk or stop moving.
- **Wire fencing** – A stressed, excited, or frightened pig may run through wire fencing, inflicting injury upon itself.

Additional Resources

Kittawornrat A, Zimmerman JJ. Toward a better understanding of pig behavior and pig welfare. Animal Health Research Reviews 2010.

www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/animalwelfare/1_download.pdf

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