

Communication:

Handling Conflict



During an animal health emergency response, interactions with animal owners, the media and the public will occur. Some of these situations may result in tension or conflict. This handout overviews ways to handle and possibly avoid conflict situations during an animal health emergency.

Conflict Situations

- Animal owners may be angry with the situation, or fearful or distraught over the outcome.
- Differences in culture, backgrounds, values or beliefs will occur.
- Some may have anti-government or anti-authority tendencies or philosophies, and the current situation may exasperate these feelings.
- Any of these situations may cause animal owners to be non-cooperative, belligerent or even threatening.

Before a Site Visit

- **Learn about the owner**
 - What is the nature of the person?
 - What is their expected behavior?
 - Is there a real or perceived threat?
 - Are there any generation or cultural issues?
- **Tap into local knowledge/acquaintances**
 - Friend or neighbor
 - Local veterinarian, industry rep
 - Community leader
- **Consider having the acquaintance to come along if it will help diffuse the situation**

Heading to the Site

- **Avoid going alone**
 - Travel in teams or with a partner
 - Have a call-in schedule
- **Carry a cell phone at all times**

Upon Arrival

- **Be professional and respectful**
 - Introduce/identify yourself
 - Establish trust
- **Explain purpose of visit**
 - Why you are there
 - Explain necessity of visit
 - Provide background of the situation
- **Express empathy for situation**
 - The situation is hard for owner
- **Express goal to work cooperatively**

During the Visit

- **Conflict often due to misunderstanding**
- **Listen and address owners concerns and questions**
 - Listen without interrupting
 - Have a clear understanding of the concern
- **Do not blame, judge or accuse**
- **Focus on issue and goal of action**
- **Be aware of nonverbal communication**
- **Posture, facial expressions, eye contact, hand gestures**
- **Be aware of your surroundings at all times**
 - Conflict situations can escalate quickly
 - Often without warning
- **Watch for any security or safety concerns**
 - Personal safety is always a first priority!
- **Watch for changes in behavior, language or posture**

If You Are Threatened

- **Remain calm**
- **Leave immediately**
- **Do not elevate the situation or put your safety at risk**
- **Contact your supervisor immediately**
- **Some situations may require law enforcement**

Following an Incident

- **Document the situation**
- **Provide detailed information**
- **Forward the information to your supervisor**

Strategies for Communication

- **Focus on the issue**
- **Accept/respect opinions may differ**
- **Don't force compliance**
- **Work to develop common agreement**
- **If not possible, discuss situation with supervisor**
- **Formal training prior to the response**

Additional Resources

Effective Communication

<https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/downloads/is242.pdf>

Conflict Resolution Skills

<http://www.edcc.edu/counseling/documents/Conflict.pdf>

Conflict Resolution

http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/workplace/ConflictResolution_Handout_3.pdf

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