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 Just-In-Time training presentation will overview ways to handle and possibly avoid conflict situations during an animal health emergency.

**Conflict Situations**

- Angry
- Fearful
- Distraught
- Different backgrounds, values, beliefs
- Anti-government or anti-authority
- Non-cooperative
- Belligerent
- Threatening

The best way to handle these situations is to be proactive prior to the visit. First, learn as much as you can about the owner. What is the nature of the person and their expected behavior? Will they be cooperative or angered? Is there a real or perceived threat? Additionally determine if there are any generational or cultural issues. Different generations have different values. Certain religious sects or non-English speaking persons may have concerns based on their beliefs or culture of government or authority interaction.

[Photo: A cattle producer with his cows. Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture]

Tap into local personnel or acquaintances who may know the owner. In some cases, bringing along the acquaintance or community member may help to bridge the gap or diffuse the situation. This may include a friend, neighbor, the local veterinarians, respected community member, or an industry representative.

Once you have some history about the owner, and are ready to head to the site, follow these guidelines for your safety: Never go alone, especially on the first visit, unless absolutely necessary. If possible travel in teams or at a minimum with a partner or “buddy”. If this is not feasible, use a call-in schedule with your supervisor. Establish a time when you will call-in, then be sure to implement it. Carry a cell phone and phone number list for supervisory personnel with you at all times.
### Upon Arrival
- 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
  - The situation is hard for the owner
- Express empathy for the situation
- Express goal to work cooperatively

Upon arrival, handle all public interactions in a professional and respectful fashion. Introduce yourself and identify your agency or affiliation. Be aware you may be viewed as an intruder. Work to create or establish trust. Explain the purpose of your visit and why you are there. Provide the background of the situation (e.g., disease outbreak in the area). Explain the necessity of your visit or actions, such as to protect the animal health, public health, or food safety. Express your empathy for the owner and the situation. Realize the situation is hard for the animal owner. Listen with understanding and interest to their concerns. Express the goal to work cooperatively. If applicable, mention others who have cooperated or the benefit of cooperating. Sometimes it can help emphasize the larger goal and impact.

[Photo: Responder talking with a producer. Source: Jane Galyon/CFSPH Iowa State University]

### 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

The most common beginning of conflict is misunderstanding. Take time to hear and address the animal owners concerns and questions. Listen without interrupting and gain a clear understanding of the concern or issue the producer may have.

[Photo: Responder talking with a producer. Source: Jane Galyon/CFSPH Iowa State University]

### During the Visit
- 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

Avoid blaming, or being judgmental or accusatory. Focus on the issue and the goal of the action. Effective communication also includes nonverbal elements. Be aware of your visual cues such as posture, facial expressions, eye contact or hand gestures. Listen without interrupting. Have a clear understanding of the issue or concern.

### During the Visit
- 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

During your visit, remain aware of your surroundings at all times, especially for any security or safety concerns. In these situations, personal safety is always a first priority. Conflict situations can escalate quickly and sometimes without warning. Watch for changes in behavior, language, 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

**Resources**
- Effective Communication
  [https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/downloads/is242.pdf](https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/downloads/is242.pdf)
- Conflict Resolution Skills
  [http://www.edcc.edu/counseling/documents/Conflict.pdf](http://www.edcc.edu/counseling/documents/Conflict.pdf)
- Conflict Resolution

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