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June 2016

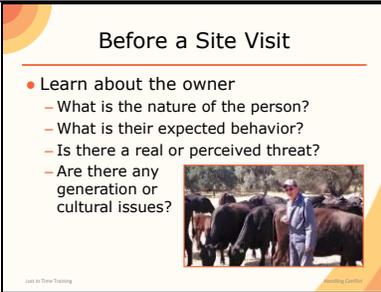
During an animal health emergency response, interactions with animal owners, the media and the public will occur. Some of these situations may result in tension or conflict. This Just-In-Time training presentation will overview ways to handle and possibly avoid conflict situations during an animal health emergency.

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During any animal health emergency, conflict situations may arise. Animal owners may be angry with the situation, or fearful or distraught over the outcome. Differences in 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.

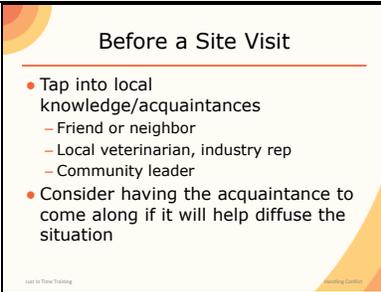
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The best way to handle these situations is to be proactive prior to the visit. First, learn as much as you can about the owner. What is the nature of the person and their expected behavior? Will they be cooperative or angered? Is there a real or perceived 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.

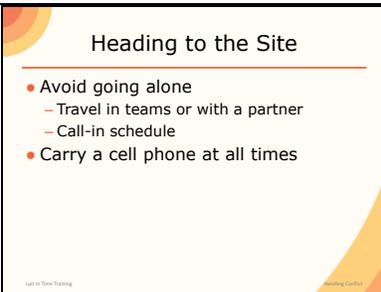
[Photo: A cattle producer with his cows. Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture]

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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.

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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.

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**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
- Express empathy for situation
  - The situation is hard for owner
- 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]

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**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]

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**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.

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**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

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**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

If you are threatened, remain calm, avoid confrontation and leave immediately. Do not elevate the situation or put your safety at risk. Contact your supervisor immediately. Some situations may require State or Federal authorities, law enforcement or possibly legal action.

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**Following an Incident**

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



After a conflict situation occurs, document the event. Provide detailed information. Forward this information to your supervisor.

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**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

Strategies for communicating include: staying focused on the issue; accept and respect the opinions of the owner and realize they may differ; do not force compliance, instead work to develop a common agreement if possible. If these strategies are not successful, leave and discuss the situation with your supervisor. To help with communication or conflict resolution, consider receiving formal training in these areas.

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**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\\_3-1-04.pdf](http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/workplace/ConflictResolution_Handout_3-1-04.pdf)

The following resources provide communication and conflict resolution information. In this presentation, we briefly reviewed how to communicate and handle conflict with animal owners during an animal health emergency. For more information on this topic, consult these additional resources.

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**Acknowledgments**

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Authors: Glenda Dvorak, DVM, MPH, DACVPM; Logan Kilburn



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