

Technical large animal rescue: approaching a rescue scenario

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Introduction

Technical large animal rescue is a niche but growing professional field, where internationally it has seen growth and application across both the veterinary and emergency sectors. This is most notable in the UK, where the rescue of animals as a skillset has been professionally embedded within the Fire Service (*BARTA, 2025*). Incidents involving animals are infrequent, however can be stressful and are considered true emergencies. Knowing how to approach a rescue scenario and developing capability and capacity within veterinary teams is an important next step towards improving safety and animal welfare outcomes at these incidents.

Types of incidents

There are many ways animals can render themselves entrapped, however these can be categorised into three distinct groupings. The first of these is a single animal response, where one animal is entrapped such as horse in a float, or a cattle beast in a drainage ditch. The second grouping is where multiple animals are entrapped, such as a livestock transporter overturn or similar. The third grouping is a large-scale disaster response, where you have many animals and species impacted.

Incident types are varied and can include many scenarios. This could include becoming trapped in mud or similar substrates, entrapment in fences, confined space rescue such as septic tanks, or becoming cast in a float or stable.

Rescue considerations

There are many considerations when sizing up an incident involving animals. On initial presentation, this includes the presenting reason for requiring rescue, and how they were entrapped initially. The type of animal presented needs to be considered, including breed, size, age, and temperament. Environmental factors to consider include location, substrate type, and proximity to hazards. Personnel, equipment and experience should all be considered when weighing up these scenarios, and at what point the incident exceeds this capacity to safely perform the rescue.

Conclusion

There are a number of approaches when responding to incidents involving animals. The rescue approach should be weighed up against the considerations presented at the incident, such as animal behaviour and environmental factors. Incidents involving animals are considered emergencies and should be conducted with safety and animal welfare at the forefront of every decision.

References

AFAC. *Large animal rescue operations*, 2022

BARTA. *Resources*, 2024

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