



# SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



## ANIMAL CARCASS DISPOSAL BEST PRACTICES

Many public employees must handle the remains of a deceased animal at some point. The carcasses of an animal can present several potential hazards to those who must pick up and dispose of them. Tasks can include:

- Road kills of wildlife
- Road kills of pets
- Deceased animals in traps
- Dispatching injured animals
- Animal hoarding incidents
- Animal fighting incidents
- Deceased diseased animals
- Drowned animals in pools

### Hazard Assessment

Most situations that require the handling of animal remains are not emergencies. Employees have the time to identify hazards and plan the appropriate safeguards. Employees and supervisors must take the time to conduct a hazard assessment and assemble the equipment to do the job safely.

Use tools and equipment to avoid directly handling the remains and the dead animal's body fluids (i.e., blood, urine, feces). If contact occurs, wash the area with soap and water as soon as possible.

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Wear appropriate personal protective equipment:

- **Gloves** – Wear rubber or nitrile gloves. Double gloving with a second pair of rubber or cloth gloves may be added. For animals with sharp bones, antlers, or teeth, wear heavy-duty puncture-resistant or cut-resistant outer gloves over nitrile inner gloves. Always use proper doff technique (glove-in-glove removal) when removing gloves to avoid self-contamination.
- **Eye and Face Protection** – Splashing or spraying animal fluids into the eyes is a low-frequency, high-risk hazard. Safety glasses are a minimum requirement. For decomposed or fluid-saturated carcasses, a full face shield is more appropriate than safety glasses alone.
- **Coveralls** – If the animal is large and could contact the employee's clothing, wear Tyvek® disposable coveralls.
- **Footwear** – Wear closed-toe, waterproof boots at all times when handling carcasses.
- **Respiratory Protection** – Decomposing carcasses release hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, and aerosolized pathogens – all inhalation hazards. An N95 respirator is recommended as a minimum precaution, especially in enclosed or low-airflow environments. For significantly decomposed animals, a half-face respirator with organic vapor/P100 cartridges should be considered. Note: Vapor rub under the nose may reduce unpleasant odors but provides NO protection against pathogens and is not a substitute for respiratory protection.

### Disease and Pathogen Hazards

Deceased animals with no obvious signs of injury should be assumed to have died from disease. Most animal pathogens are not transferable to humans. However, several pathogens represent a real hazard to employees. To address these potential hazards, the following precautions should be used whenever handling animal carcasses:

Wear protective gloves, eyewear, and respiratory protection.

Use long-handled tools and lifting aids to minimize direct contact with the remains.

Be prepared with bags to hold the carcass.

Do not disturb remains with no obvious sign of injury AND that show evidence of hemorrhaging at the mouth, nose, or anus. These conditions may indicate anthrax as a possible cause of the animal's death. Movement of the carcass could release disease-carrying spores into the environment. Immediately contact the DEP Hotline (877-WARN-DEP) or your local health department.

### Key Zoonotic Disease Risks for NJ Municipal Workers

- **Rabies** – New Jersey has one of the highest rabies rates in the Northeast. Raccoons, foxes, skunks, and bats are the primary vectors. Any animal found dead with no obvious trauma should be treated as potentially rabid. Never handle bats with bare hands, even if the bat appears dead.
- **Leptospirosis** – Common in rodents and wildlife; transmitted through urine-contaminated water or soil. This is particularly relevant for workers handling carcasses near waterways or in flooded areas.
- **West Nile Virus (WNV)** – Dead birds, especially crows and blue jays, can be indicators of WNV activity. New Jersey has an active WNV surveillance program. Report dead bird clusters to the NJ Department of Health.
- **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)** – Dead waterfowl or poultry should be reported and handled with heightened precautions, including an N95 respirator (at minimum) rather than safety glasses alone.
- **E. coli and Salmonella** – These pathogens can be prevalent in animal carcasses and represent a hazard to employees. Strict hand hygiene and PPE use are essential.
- **Tularemia** – Can be contracted through contact with infected animal tissues or fluids, particularly from rabbits and rodents.

### Insects, Parasites, and Odors

Carcasses may also carry insects and parasites that can injure or cause employees' discomfort. Avoid contact with the dead animal's external parasites (i.e., fleas and ticks). If possible, spray the carcass with flea & tick spray before handling it.

Unpleasant smells and disturbing sights may be present. Vapor rub under the nose may help reduce odor discomfort, but remember it does not protect against pathogens. Use appropriate respiratory protection as described above.

### Special Situations

- **Deer Carcasses** – Deer are among the most common carcass removal tasks for NJ municipal workers. Due to their size, always use mechanical lifting aids where possible. Be alert for signs of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD): emaciation, listlessness, lowered head, drooping ears, excessive salivation, or repetitive walking in set patterns. Report suspected CWD cases to the NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife. Note: It is illegal to take the head or antlers of a dead deer as a trophy.
- **Dead Fish / Aquatic Animals** – Large numbers of dead fish can indicate a pollution event or disease outbreak. Do not simply dispose of them — report fish kills to the NJ DEP Hotline (877-WARN-DEP) before taking any action.
- **Animal Hoarding and Fighting Scenes** – These scenes may involve law enforcement coordination, biohazard-level contamination, and psychologically disturbing conditions. Employees should not enter these scenes without supervisor authorization and appropriate PPE. Coordinate actions with law enforcement and public health officials.

### Decontamination

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or an antibacterial product after handling a carcass, even though gloves were worn.

Clean equipment in the field, when possible, to prevent bringing potential contaminants back to the shop. If you must do the cleaning at the shop, equipment may be decontaminated with hot soapy water or a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.

Consider using disposable tools for handling carcasses to minimize decontamination needs.

## Post-Exposure Protocol

If skin contact, a puncture, bite, or mucous membrane exposure (eyes, nose, mouth) occurs:

- Wash the affected area immediately with soap and water.
- Report the exposure to your supervisor immediately, even if PPE was worn.
- Seek prompt medical evaluation — particularly for any puncture, bite, or eye/mouth contact.
- Document the incident per your organization's injury and illness reporting procedures.

Employees who regularly handle animal carcasses should discuss pre-exposure rabies vaccination with their occupational health provider. This is a recognized best practice for workers with frequent contact with wildlife.

Know your municipality's post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) protocol for rabies before an incident occurs.

## Heat Stress Awareness

New Jersey summers are hot and humid. Employees wearing Tyvek coveralls, gloves, and respirators face a significant risk of heat stress. Monitor yourself and coworkers for symptoms of heat illness: heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness, nausea, or confusion. Take regular breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas, stay hydrated, and work in pairs.

## Carcass Disposal Methods

The disposal of the carcass can include composting, burying, or incineration. If the carcass is to be transported to a disposal facility, it should be placed in a plastic bag and sealed as soon as possible. If a zoonotic disease is suspected (e.g., rabies or tularemia), it is recommended to double bag the carcass.

- **Burial:**
  - Carcasses should not be buried within 5 feet of the seasonal high-water table or within 10 feet of bedrock. Do not bury carcasses in sandy or gravel soils to prevent groundwater impacts. Bury a maximum of two carcasses per hole.
  - The carcass must be completely covered with soil or wood chips.
  - There must be a separation distance of at least three feet from edge to edge of carcass burial locations.
  - Note: Burial and incineration may require permits. Confirm compliance with local ordinances before proceeding.
- **Other Disposal Options:**
  - Transport carcasses to a landfill for disposal.
  - Incinerate carcasses at an approved facility.
  - Transport the remains to approved wildlife refuge facilities for animal food use upon approval of the facility owner or operator.

## Reporting Unusual Wildlife Mortality

Whenever there is an unusual mortality or die-off of wildlife, contact the appropriate authorities. The carcass(es) should be refrigerated as soon as possible until a decision is made as to its disposition.

Report to the NJ DEP Hotline (877-WARN-DEP) or your local health department when:

- 5 or more animals (except game birds) die in the same incident.
- Recurring deaths of animals occur in the same location over a period of time.
- Individual deer show symptoms that may indicate Chronic Wasting Disease.
- Incidents involve threatened or endangered species ([www.njfishandwildlife.com/tandespp.htm](http://www.njfishandwildlife.com/tandespp.htm)), regardless of the cause of death or the number of animals involved.
- Large numbers of dead fish or aquatic animals are found.
- Dead waterfowl or poultry are found (possible HPAI).
- Dead birds (especially crows or blue jays) are found in clusters (possible West Nile Virus).