

LIVESTOCK AND HORSE DEATH PROBLEMS

Prepared by Michelle Shooter, Livestock Extension Agent, North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, and Becky Spearman, Livestock Extension Agent, North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Bladen County Center

From information by: Jean-Marie Luginbuhl, Kevin L. Anderson, and Heather M. Glennon, Specialists with North Carolina State University

Livestock producers occasionally have animals to die unexpectedly. These owners want to know what caused the death. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) has a diagnostic laboratory that can assess a dead animal to help determine what caused the animal to die. The lab charges fees based upon the size and description of the dead animal. Below are some guidelines to submit your animal to the lab. NCDA&CS will send a report back to help producers determine a plan of action to keep their animals safe in the future.

I Had An Animal Die Unexpectedly, Now What?

Examination of a deceased animal to determine cause of death, like an autopsy in a human, is referred to as a “necropsy.” The purpose of this examination is to determine the cause of death of the animal and whether or not it represents a concern for the rest of the herd. Necropsies may reveal presence of parasites, pneumonia, or other potential herd problems.

Some animal deaths are the result of obvious causes: death caused by a predator, by an electrified fence, by the weight of a round bale of hay, etc. But when the cause of death is unknown, without performing a necropsy on a recently dead animal, it is often impossible to determine the cause of death. This brochure discusses ways to get your animal to local NCDA Veterinary Diagnostic Labs; however, in some communities, local veterinarians also can perform necropsies. Contact your local veterinarian to see if they typically perform large animal necropsies.

If a predator or other method of death cannot be determined and you are interested in having a necropsy performed by an NCDA diagnostic lab, follow these guidelines:

- **IMMEDIATELY** remove the animal from the field or barn where it died, and place the dead animal in a sealed plastic bag. Store the animal in a refrigerator or a large cooler with ice. This is crucial to preserve the animal and make it more likely that a cause of death can be determined. **DO NOT FREEZE THE DEAD ANIMAL.** Always remember to wear disposable gloves and wash your hands thoroughly after moving the animal, because if there is a disease present, you do not want to expose yourself or other animals to it.
- Take or ship the dead animal immediately or as soon as possible to the nearest N.C. Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.
- If the dead animal is already in a state of decomposition, take it to a licensed rendering facility or bury it on your property at least 3 feet deep and not within 300 feet of any flowing stream of public body of water.

- If you do take or ship an animal to a diagnostic lab, a complete history should accompany all submissions and include the address and telephone number of the owner as well as the age, breed, and sex of the animal. A complete history is important in assessing the situation. Fill out the submission form with as much detail as possible.
- Specimens mailed to the laboratory should be clearly labeled and submittal forms should accompany the specimens sealed in a separate plastic bag.
- In all cases, the method of shipment should be an overnight service to maximize the reliability of any diagnostic test findings. (Keep in mind, there are numerous regulations about what can be shipped and how it needs to be shipped and labeled.)
- Contaminated, decomposed, or inappropriate specimens will not be processed.

Submission Form Guidelines

A completed submission form must accompany samples submitted to a N.C. Veterinary Diagnostic Lab. Complete the form as thoroughly as possible. The forms are comprehensive and ask for information that may not seem important but is necessary to provide timely, accurate results.

The General Submission Form Information Required:

- Complete veterinarian information. Include clinic name and veterinarian’s name.
- Owner name, address, and phone number in case additional information is needed
- County where animal resided
- Species and breed of animal(s)
- Sample collection and shipment dates
- Animal/Specimen ID
- Age and sex of animal
- Color is only necessary when bodies are submitted.
- Type of specimen and site for biopsies
- Test request(s) - A dead animal provides only part of the story; the clinical signs, diagnostic results, and your impressions provide the complete story.
- Complete history - Include clinical signs; physical examination notes; lab work; or other diagnostic results, treatment, and response; number of animals affected; total number of animals in the group; duration of illness; housing and feeding and any changes; vaccination status; and any other information that you feel is pertinent.

Below is a part of the submission form:

Specimen/ Animal ID	Breed	Sex	Age	Color	Specimen type(s): body, serum, tissue, feed, etc.	Test Requested
Lucky	mixed	FM	5 y	Blk/white	Body	Necropsy

- Necropsy: In the section found below this table, be sure to mark if the animal was euthanized or died naturally and the date and approximate time of death.
- Sample processing and testing may be delayed if any of the above items are not present.
- If you have questions, call the laboratory before you take the specimens.

N.C. Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory Fees

The following is a list of fee-based services. Necropsy carcass disposal fees are based on weight animal: \$15.00 (0-100 lbs.); \$25.00 (101-500 lbs.); \$50.00 (over 500 lbs.). Fees are effective as of July 29, 2010.

Large Companion Animal Necropsy (Horses, Llama, etc.)	\$75*
Food Animal Necropsy	\$25*
Poultry Necropsy (up to 8 birds)	\$15*
Additional birds	\$5 each

* \$25.00 out of state surcharge applies to necropsies where veterinarian, client and animal reside outside NC.

After submitting your animal for necropsy, the N.C. Veterinary Diagnostic Lab will send you a report with their findings. Producers should work with their veterinarian for recommended treatment when the laboratory work is complete. You can also contact your Livestock Extension Agent for more information about specific diseases or help in developing a Herd Health Management Plan.

Contact the N.C. Veterinary Diagnostic Lab at:

Phone: (919) 733-3986

Website: <http://www.ncvdl.com/>

E-mail: NCVDL@ncmail.net

The website home page has the following links: About NCVDL, Facilities Directory, NCVDL Services, NCVDL Fees, Specimen Submittal, NCVDL Submission Forms, Utilizing the NCVDL System, Veterinary Division, and Staff Directory. If you have a username and password, test results can be accessed on-line.

The nearest branch laboratories to us are in Raleigh and Monroe. Some tests are not performed at all laboratories - branch laboratory personnel should be consulted before submitting specimens to them for special procedures. The laboratories are open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Emergency after hours, weekend, and holiday submissions must be arranged by contacting the laboratory.

Raleigh

Rollins Laboratory
2101 Blue Ridge Road
Raleigh, NC 27607

Phone: 919-733-3986; Fax: 919-733-0454

E-mail: Gene.Erickson@ncmail.net

Contact: Dr. Gene Erickson

Postal Address: Rollins Laboratory
1031 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1031

Directions: Take I-95 North to Exit 81 (I-40). From I-40, take Exit 289 (Wade Avenue) toward Raleigh. Take 2nd exit ramp (Blue Ridge Road Exit) and turn left at stoplight on Blue Ridge Road. Go 0.5 miles and turn left into the Laboratory parking lot. Rollins Laboratory is located near the N.C. State Fairgrounds and the N.C. State Veterinary School.

Monroe

Griffin Laboratory
P. O. Box 2183, 401 Quarry Road
Monroe, NC 28112

Phone: 704-289-6448; Fax: 704-283-9660

E-mail: MonroeVet@vnet.net

Contact: Dr. Kim Hagans

Postal Address: Griffin Laboratory
P. O. Box 2183
Monroe, NC 28112

Directions: From US 74/US 601, turn right onto Venus Street (Across from Hospital), go to end of road. Take a right on Quarry Road. Turn immediately to the left into the Laboratory parking lot.