

Beef Cattle Health Concerns Following Fire

Rachel Endecott, Beef Cattle Specialist

(406) 994-3747, rachel.endecott@montana.edu

ABB 219, PO Box 172900, Bozeman, MT 59717

What kind of health concerns should be monitored in cattle who have experienced fire? Inhalation of smoke, burn injuries, stress from exertion, and injuries that happened during cattle's escape from danger may all play a longer-term role. Here are some considerations for monitoring cattle post-fire

Lungs

Smoke inhalation can cause both immediate and long-term harm. If cattle have burned muzzles or faces, or crusty noses, they are more likely to have smoke inhalation issues. In the short term (first day), fluid may build up in the lungs, causing them to swell and resulting in coughing with rapid, moist breathing. Several hours to several days post-fire, small airways deep within the lungs can swell and cause issues with oxygen exchange, resulting in labored breathing and perhaps wheezing as air tries to move through partial blockages. In the longer term (4-10 days), pneumonia potential is increased if lungs have been damaged. Generally, the lungs will be as healed as they're going to get 4-6 weeks after fire. During healing, breathing issues may continue to be observed with exertion or stress. Consult your veterinarian for treatment advice as preventative antibiotics may be an option to prevent pneumonia.

Feet

Cattle may not show immediate signs of feet problems. Unfortunately, the most common result to major heat damage to the hooves is sloughing them 1-3 weeks post-fire. Sudden lameness with signs of infection around the coronary band may indicate hooves are in the process of sloughing. Treatment with antibiotics will not help. These animals probably should be humanely euthanized.

Teats/Udders

Evaluate udders and teats carefully, as burns can lead to inflammation which could yield mastitis or non-productive quarters the following year. Taking a close look at the health of teat openings is an important consideration when making culling decisions.

Bulls

Burn damage impacts to sheaths and scrotums may not be evident for 4-6 weeks. Examine sheaths for excessive scarring that could block the opening as healing progresses. Breeding soundness exams should be even more of a priority before next year's breeding season for bulls who experienced fire.

Eyes

Irritation of eyes from smoke and heat will exhibit signs similar to pinkeye, but healing will probably take longer than pinkeye does. Consult your veterinarian about potential treatment of these animals with antibiotics.

References:

Wildfire Aftermath: Beef Cattle Health Considerations, Russ Daly, South Dakota State University Extension
Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Disaster Education Network: Fires & Wildfires Resources