Standard Operating Procedure for

Dehorning of Weaned Heifer Dairy Calves

Definition and Reason for Procedure:
The removal of horn buds from young calves is done to prevent goring, bruising, and other injury to animals and people, especially during transport and handling. Hornless cattle require less feed bunk space when housed in groups in a REDACTED INFO, typical of that used for older heifers and cows at The Pennsylvania State University.

Facility: REDACTED INFO
Age: After Weaning
Equipment: A commercial electric cauterizing iron (dehorner), halter, portable chute with a head-gate
Restraint: Manual. 1-person. Calf is placed chute/head-gate. A halter is used to secure the head to either side

Procedure:

1. Plug commercial electric dehorner into a socket 10 minutes prior to intended use in order for iron to become hot enough to cauterize tissue.

2. Palpate the poll of the calf to confirm that horn buds are present. If a bud is not present, record this observation in the animal’s individual record and move to the next calf.

3. If calves are greater than 5 weeks of age, proper local anesthesia must be used unless justified in an IACUC protocol and approved by the IACUC.

4. Place calf in portable chute (feed and/or water do not need to be withheld from the calf prior to the procedure) and secure head with head-gate. Place halter on the head of the calf and secure head to left or right side.

5. Hair does not need to be clipped. Place the hot end of the dehorner over one of the horns so that the iron is in direct contact with the skin at its base. Apply mild pressure with a back-and-forth (180 degree) rotation to cauterize the surface of the skin until it is a “copper” color (takes between 20-40 seconds).

6. Strike the cap of the horn with the blunt side of the hot iron. This will dislodge the cap and allow it to be discarded with little (if any) hemorrhage.

7. Repeat steps 4 and 5 on the other horn. Nothing is applied topically.
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8. Remove halter and return calf to pen.

Post-treatment:

The general health and attitude of each calf is observed several times during the following 24 hours and then twice daily for the following week during routine feeding and care. Special attention is made for evidence of swelling of the poll or drainage during the following 5 days. Calves showing evidence of infection (excessive swelling or drainage of the poll, inappetence, depression, etc) during the net 5 days following this procedure should be reported to the facility manager who will contact the veterinarian.

Precautions:

● Person performing the procedure should avoid distractions
● Do not rush the procedure
● Only well-trained or supervised individuals will perform this procedure

Individuals currently authorized to perform these procedures without supervision are:

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