

Case Scenario Template

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Scenario Theme: Animals used for Work, Sport, Recreation or Display / Companion animal

Scenario Topic: Transportation of a dog on the back of a Utility Vehicle ('ute')

Name of client / Animal: Jerry Stockman / 'Mick'

Age, sex, species/breed of patient(s): 18 month old, male intact, Blue Cattle dog

Patient's problem(s): Being transported in the back of an open vehicle; dog arrives at the veterinary clinic mildly hyperthermic and stressed

Case ILO objectives: 1, 2, 5, 19, 21, 37

AW / Ethical challenges: Appropriate transportation of working (and pet) dogs, husbandry

Aims and Objectives

To be aware of dog welfare and safety issues when dogs are transported in open-backed vehicles, and to enable client communication regarding the issues.

Time

Working through this scenario and writing your responses should take 30-40 minutes.

Background Information

'Mick' is a working dog on a cattle property in North Queensland.

'Mick's' owner, Jerry, has made an appointment at your veterinary clinic for 'Mick' to have his annual health check. It has been a pretty warm day and 'Mick' has been tethered to the back of Jerry's 'ute' (an open vehicle with a flat tray) for the two hour long journey from Jerry's property to the clinic. 'Mick' is starting to show signs of heat stress, is panting hard with a temperature of 39.8°C, and appears distressed on arrival at the clinic. There has been no shelter or shade in the back of the ute and the water bowl has spilled over. Your receptionist has provided 'Mick' with some water and also a wet towel to cool him down. Jerry says he has always transported his dogs in this way and feels that 'Mick' "is a bit hot but will be fine". 'Mick' is wearing a choker chain. Once he has been provided with some water and cooling, 'Mick' appears to recover fully and is ready for his consultation.

Background Information

Transportation can be stressful for dogs and it is important that the journey be made as comfortable and as safe as possible. Legislation for transporting dogs in Australia varies from state & territory to state & territory. However, thousands of dogs are injured each year while travelling in the back of open vehicles because the dogs are not properly restrained. While the RSPCA Australia does not have a specific policy on the appropriate restraint of dogs in cars they do have a policy regarding containers for transport (RSPCA Policy FI Transportation of animals - general principles) - the container should enable the animal to lie down comfortably in a natural position, turn around, stand and sit erect and stretch with clearance.



Image credit: https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/68252/Dogs-in-Utes.pdf

Instructions to students

Tasks:

1. Read the following article on the legality of having unrestrained dogs on ute trays or trucks in Australia to familiarise yourself with the relevant acts/special conditions and requirements in your state/territory:
 - RSPCA Australia Knowledge base: Is it legal to have unrestrained dogs on ute trays or trucks?
 - http://kb.rspca.org.au/is-it-legal-to-have-unrestrained-dogs-on-ute-trays-or-trucks_501.html
2. Read the following article on dog welfare and safety while travelling on vehicles, and list some common causes of injury incurred by dogs that are improperly transported in open-backed vehicles:
 - Transporting dogs in utes
 - <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industry/agriculture/animal-management/land-management-for-livestock-farms/welfare-movement-livestock/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-during-transport/transporting-dogs-utes>
3. Jerry is a responsible owner and 'Mick' is a working dog. Nevertheless, you are concerned that Jerry needs to be more aware that transporting 'Mick' in this way could be harmful. Describe how you would raise your concerns with Jerry that 'Mick's' welfare is being compromised by the current transport arrangements and suggest ways that this could be improved.

Model Answer

2. Common causes of injury include:
 - Dogs being struck by tree branches
 - Dogs being struck by oncoming or passing vehicles
 - Dogs being dragged along the side of vehicles after overbalancing
 - Dogs attempting to jump from moving vehicles

3. How to raise concern: Suggest that Jerry is pretty handy with his tools and that he could make 'Mick' a shelter for the back of the truck. As 'Mick' is a valuable working dog, it may be worth suggesting that this would be an investment in looking after a resource and a more comfortable way for 'Mick' to travel when needed.

Suggestions for improvement: Explain to Jerry that 'Mick' needs to hang on and brace himself during the journey, which is tiring. Ideally, Jerry should have 'Mick' in a shelter with an enclosed cage of the right size. The cage should enable the animal to lie down comfortably in a natural position, turn around, stand and sit erect and stretch with clearance. The cage needs to be well covered to provide shelter from the sun, rain and wind. The cage should ideally be placed behind the cabin to minimise exposure to dust and wind.

If Jerry wishes to continue to tether 'Mick', then he should use a flat collar or a harness rather than a choke chain. If he is attaching a lead or chain he should ensure that it is secured to a point in the

middle of the ute cabin and is the right length (to allow 'Mick' to move about comfortably but not long enough for 'Mick' to be able to reach the ute's side). The tether should have swivels at both ends to prevent it becoming entangled.

If there is a metal floor on the ute, then this should be covered to ensure that 'Mick' does not get burnt paws.

Provide a water bowl, there are special non spill dog water bowls available and/or Jerry should stop regularly to check on 'Mick' and provide him with water (and toileting opportunities).

Any loose tools or equipment in the back of the ute should be secured to ensure that this does not injure 'Mick'.

If Jerry still is not really convinced, there are some legal ramifications to his behaviour. There is a legal obligation to keep dogs safe, secure and comfortable while in transit, and fines can be imposed for breaching the law. There are also penalties for travelling with an unsecured load on the back of a light vehicle, and an unrestrained dog can be considered to be an unsecured load.

Further Reading

Rooney, N., Gaines, S. & Hiby, Y. (2009). A practitioner's guide to working dog welfare. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, 4(3), 127-134.

End.