

American Association of Bovine Practitioners Publish Dehorning Guidelines



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Recently, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners' board of directors approved and published guidelines when disbudding and dehorning both dairy and beef cattle. These guidelines reemphasize the importance of both the owner and veterinarian (person who signs the yearly VCPR agreement) developing and implementing protocols which work for a particular operation. Disbudding or dehorning should be performed at the earliest age possible and should use practices that promote healing and minimize pain. Disbudding, is preferred, as it involves removing or destroying the horn-producing tissue before the horn attaches to the skull with calves being less than 6 to 8 weeks of age. Specifically, these guidelines address the following:

- Calves should be properly restrained, such that stress is minimized for both the calf and person performing the procedures. Employees performing this procedure should be trained not only on the procedure, but also on safe, low stress handling methods.
- When appropriate, polled sires can be used to produce polled offspring.
- Acceptable methods for disbudding include the use of caustic paste (see article in this issue) or electric/gas dehorning. When using caustic paste, ideally it should be applied within the first 2 days of life.
- Pain management should be considered the “standard of care” when performing disbudding or dehorning procedures. Farmers should work with their veterinarian to develop the most appropriate pain management protocol. These pain management protocols involve the use of a local anesthetic (i.e. nerve blocks) for immediate pain relief (these may last up to 5 hrs) as well as NSAID drugs (i.e. meloxicam) for longer lasting pain relief (up to 48 hrs after single dose). Use of either of these type of drugs must be used under an extra-label drug use protocol developed by a licensed veterinarian through a valid VCPR relationship.
- For those wishing to read these guidelines, they [can be accessed on line](#) or a copy can be printed by your local extension office for those without web access.