

# Truck West, April 2004

## When Pigs Fly: What to Do in the Event of a Liner Rollover

*By James Menzies*

RED DEER, Alta. - Tractor-trailer accidents are never good news, but when you're hauling a load of live animals, the results can be devastating.

And while liner rollovers don't occur every day - they do happen, and when they do, it's always a mess.

So knowing how to respond in the face of a liner rollover is essential for every livestock hauler.

In Alberta, there have been at least 17 reported liner accidents since September 2002. Of those, 14 were rollovers.

Two loads of pigs and a load of bison have ended up with the dirty side in the air and the rest all involved cattle.

"And this is in a year with a significant drop in liner traffic," points out Jennifer Woods, an expert on dealing with liner rollovers.

When a liner rollover happens in Alberta, Woods is often called to the scene.

Her job is to establish some order and ensure the animals are safely extricated from the trailer, or humanely euthanized on site. While she has attended countless liner accidents, she says every one is different.

And even though Woods has been inside countless catteliner in her life, she says she often has trouble getting her bearings when stepping into a wrecked trailer.

"A wrecked liner is a pretty big mess," says Woods.

"When it flips over, you lose a lot of floor space. If you flip to the right, your doghouse is on the ground and if you flip to the left, you have a whole different scenario.

"I don't care how well you know a liner, once you've stepped inside a rolled liner, you have to get your bearings. It's completely different."

When a liner wreck happens, there are several common problems that often arise on the scene. The biggest issue is a lack of knowledge and training on the part of emergency workers - usually the local fire department or RCMP.

"They don't understand how these trailers are put together," says Woods, who offers a one-of-a-kind training course on dealing with liner wrecks to emergency workers.

"Even the cattle people who show up often don't know how to handle the cattle."

Often, a power struggle ensues between the trucker, the livestock owner and emergency workers. But the RCMP has command of the scene, stresses Woods, although they'll often relinquish it to the fire department.

"There is a chain of command there," point out Woods.

"You need to show respect for the fire department and RCMP and you have to work with them."

Another problem that often occurs is that too many people show up at the accident scene.

Having too many helpers can actually increase the stress of the surviving animals and pose a safety hazard as well when the bullets start to fly.

"It's quite a social event when a bloody liner flips!" Woods says. "Don't take too many trailers (for the clean up) - the RCMP gets agitated when you have too many trailers lined up on the side of the road. You don't need a whole bunch of people there, it tends to cause problems."

All too often, truckers will bring in a second trailer and then rush the animals out of the wrecked liner and into the second trailer. Woods warns against forcing the animals to run from one trailer to another.

"You cannot tell if they're truly injured until you get them out of the trailer," Woods insists.

"Imagine flipping over and the fire department telling you to get out and run to the ambulance that's half a mile down the road! Do not yell and scream at these animals and rush them off the trailer. You need to keep in mind that these animals are really, really stressed. You want to keep things quiet."

Sadly, in the event of a liner rollover, it's often necessary to euthanize injured livestock.

This must be done on site, as it's illegal to transport an injured animal.

The RCMP isn't always keen on killing animals, but if they suggest transporting the animals to a local vet to be put down you must refuse to do so, says Woods.

"It's illegal to load an animal with a broken leg or a broken back and transport them. They have to be put down on the spot," stresses Woods.

"The RCMP has to understand this."

A well-placed bullet is the most humane way to euthanize injured animals, she says, adding slitting their throats to ensure they're dead isn't a bad idea, either.

When euthanizing livestock, it's often necessary to do so inside the trailer.

It's crucial to be extremely careful when shooting inside a cattleliner, says Woods. Make sure only the shooter is in the trailer, and be prepared to lose your hearing for a while afterwards.

"It is extremely, extremely loud to fire a gun in the belly of a liner," warns Woods.

"But a lot of time the shooting has to take place in that trailer."

If you're transporting calves and feeder cattle, it's important to handle them with care following a liner wreck.

They are more likely to go off their feed and they should be closely monitored for delayed signs of injury, says Woods.

Fat cattle should be killed immediately.

If killed within six to eight hours, they are less likely to become "dark cutters" (the term given to meat that darkens and becomes spongy due to stress, severely reducing the value of the meat).

If you can't kill the fat cattle within eight hours, then Woods suggests keeping them for one or two weeks before putting them down, so hormone levels return to normal.

"If you can't get him right there at the beginning, I'd hold him," she suggests.

Dairy bulls should also be killed immediately, as they will pose a real danger to the humans that are attending to them.

But the biggest challenge is working well with the emergency response workers and educating them about what to do, adds Woods.

In some instances, the police are happy to turn their guns over and let the trucker or cattle handlers do the shooting.

"A lot of these guys are city guys," she says, adding some emergency response professionals have had to seek counseling after attending a liner rollover.

Woods is on a crusade to educate Alberta's RCMP and fire departments on the proper handling of a liner wreck.

Her course (which can also be geared towards livestock truckers) covers the following: On-the-spot response decision making; animal behavior (cattle, horses, pigs, sheep, elk, llamas, poultry - particularly in distress situations); human safety precautions when handling distressed livestock; means to calm, rescue, capture and temporarily confine animals; laws, ethics and euthanasia protocol; livestock handlers, veterinarians and other response team contacts specific to an area.

For more information about the course, contact Woods at 403-684-3008.

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