Hudson Valley Community College
Animal Carcass Handling Safety Procedures

INTRODUCTION

Hudson Valley Community College employees may occasionally remove animal carcasses from campus roadways or buildings or observe wild animals on campus acting in a manner suggesting they may be sick. Animal carcasses must be handled with care to prevent exposure to serious diseases that may be carried by the animals including, but not limited to, rabies. Animals appearing sick should be avoided and the appropriate authorities notified.

These procedures identify the tasks HVCC employees may perform with animal carcasses and the precautions, work practices and personal protective equipment needed to protect employees and prevent the spread of rabies and other diseases.

BACKGROUND

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord). Infected mammals can transmit rabies virus to humans and other mammals. Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms appear.

Rabies is most often seen among wild animals such as raccoons, bats, skunks and foxes, but any mammal can be infected with rabies. Pets and livestock can get rabies if they are not vaccinated to protect them against infection.

Some animals *almost never* get rabies. These include rabbits and small rodents such as squirrels, chipmunks, rats, mice, guinea pigs, gerbils and hamsters. It is possible for these animals to get rabies, but only in rare circumstances, such as if they are attacked but not killed by a rabid animal. Reptiles (such as lizards and snakes), amphibians (like frogs), birds, fish and insects do not get or carry rabies.

The first sign of rabies is usually a change in an animal's behavior. It may become unusually aggressive or tame. The animal may lose its fear of people and natural enemies. A wild animal may appear affectionate and friendly. It may become excited or irritable and attack anything in its path. Staggering, convulsions, choking, frothing at the mouth and paralysis are sometimes seen. Many animals will make very unusual sounds. Infected animals usually die within one week after showing signs of rabies. Many signs of rabies in animals, such as the animal appearing drunk or excessively wobbly, circling, seeming partially paralyzed, acting disorientated or mutilating itself can be indicative of other diseases like distemper or lead poisoning. There are few behavioral signs that are telltale of rabies alone.

The early symptoms of rabies in people are similar to that of many other illnesses, including fever, headache, and general weakness or discomfort. As the disease progresses, more specific symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation (increase in saliva), difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death usually occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms. Fortunately, only a few human cases are reported each year in the United States.

People usually get exposed to the rabies virus when they are bitten by an infected animal. Exposure may also occur if saliva or other potentially infectious material, such as brain tissue, from a rabid animal enters an open cut or mucous membrane (eyes, nose or mouth). Rabies is not transmitted through the blood, urine or feces of an infected animal, nor is it spread airborne through the open environment. The rabies virus can survive in saliva and body fluids for a few hours outside of the body but can survive for longer

periods in the carcass of a dead animal.

EXPOSURE POTENTIAL

The following is a list of tasks that may involve exposure to animal carcasses and the staff that may perform these tasks:

- Removing dead animal carcasses from roadways and buildings – Physical Plant Grounds Staff
- Removing live or dead birds from buildings – Physical Plant Custodial Staff
- Removing dead mice from buildings - Physical Plant Custodial Staff

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

Consider all exposures to known vectors as rabid, including all road kills. Known vectors include:

- Bats
- Red & Grey fox
- Raccoons
- Skunks
- Domestic animals (dogs and cats)
- Livestock
- Other carnivorous wild animals

Other bacteria and diseases can be carried and transmitted by birds and animals not on the list above. Consider all exposures to other animals and birds as potentially infectious and follow the practices below for handling all dead animals.

SAFE WORK PRACTICES

Sick Animals

Contact should be avoided with wild animals that appear to be sick (e.g. acting aggressively, frothing at the mouth, friendly to humans, staggering, convulsing, etc.). Animals that are observed to be injured, dying or appearing diseased should be reported Public Safety at 518-629-7210. Public Safety and Physical Plant will determine if the animal can be safely relocated out of the public areas. They should keep others away from the animal and encourage movement only from a safe distance. If outside assistance is needed, Public Safety will contact the Town of North Greenbush or City of Troy Animal Control Department, depending on where the animal is located with respect to Town and City boundaries.

Carcasses of animals that are euthanized by the appropriate authorities should be handled following the procedures below and utilizing the specified Personal Protective Equipment.

Handling Animal Carcasses

- Personal Protective Equipment - Heavy rubber or nitrile gloves, safety glasses or goggles and safety shoes should be worn when handling animal carcasses. Tyvek suits should be worn if blood or other fluids are present and likely to get on clothing or skin.
- Use the designated shovel to pick up a road-killed animal. The shovel is spray painted orange, labeled as “Carcass Scoop” and stored in the LaPan Tool crib. Use this shovel only for road kills.
- Confirm the animal is dead by prodding with a long-handled tool. Startling an injured animal can increase the potential for injury or contamination.
- When animal carcasses are transported for disposal, care shall be taken to avoid contact and contain body fluids during transport as follows:
    - Small animal carcasses should be collected in plastic trash bags for disposal. The bag should be strong (greater than 4mil) to avoid puncture by the teeth, claws or broken

bones of the carcass. By dropping the bag over the carcass, and grabbing the carcass through the bag, any possibility of personal contamination can be completely avoided. A shovel or other tool may be used to lift and push the carcass into the bags.
    - Seal the bag with a knot or twist tie to avoid contaminating the vehicle. Avoid throwing animals into the truck bed to minimize splashing.
    - Deer and other large carcasses should be wrapped in plastic sheets or tarps
- The bag containing the carcass should be disposed of immediately in a campus trash dumpster.
- Gloves, tarps and any other materials should be bagged and disposed of
- The shovel, truck bed and any other contaminated non-disposable equipment should be disinfected using a 10% bleach solution. The shovel can be immersed in a bucket containing the solution and the solution can be sprayed or poured over the truck bed and any other surfaces. Contact the Custodial Supervisor to mix a fresh solution of 10% bleach. Nitrile/latex gloves and safety goggles should be worn while using the bleach solution.
- Hands should be washed well with soap and water after handling the carcass and after disinfecting equipment.

If you were bitten by an animal or had contact with the saliva or other fluids from an animal, **DO NOT** dispose of the carcass. Bag and save the carcass and refer to the Post Exposure Procedures, below.

TRAINING

All employees determined to have the potential for exposure will be provided appropriate training at the time of initial assignment. Records will be maintained of all training.

VACCINATIONS

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends pre-exposure vaccinations for rabies to be offered to persons in high-risk groups, such as veterinarians and their staff, animal handlers, rabies researchers, and certain laboratory workers and considered for persons whose activities bring them into frequent contact with rabies virus or potentially rabid bats, raccoons, skunks, cats, dogs, or other species at risk for having rabies.

HVCC employees are not considered to be in high risk groups or to have frequent contact with the rabies virus. Therefore, pre-exposure vaccinations will not be required for HVCC employees

POST EXPOSURE PROCEDURES

If any body fluids contact your skin, proceed to the nearest washing facility to immediately wash with soap and water, then report to Health Services. If any body fluids contact the eyes, proceed to the nearest eye wash station and flush for 15 minutes, then report to Health Services. If an animal bites or scratches you, wash with soap and water and report to Health Services.

All potential exposures (bite, scratch or direct contact with blood or body fluids to a cut or mucous membrane) must be reported immediately to HVCC Health Services in Campus Center suite 270 AND the Rensselaer County Department of Health 518-270-2643. When an animal bite or scratch has occurred, this must also be reported through Public Safety to the animal control officer to assist with capture and isolation of the animal.

The Health Department will consider current recommendations from the New York State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and will determine the need for any follow-up action including any consideration of vaccinations. When indicated, the post-exposure vaccination series should be administered as soon as possible after the exposure.