



Literature Review on the Welfare Implications of Dogs Traveling in Truck Beds

(July 24, 2007)

THE ISSUE

Dogs transported unsecured in the cargo area (truck bed) of vehicles such as pick up trucks are at risk of injury if they jump or are thrown from the vehicle.

WELFARE CONCERNS

Injuries incurred by dogs falling or jumping from truck beds or falling within truck beds are less common than injuries incurred by free-roaming dogs struck by vehicles. However, like injuries resulting from vehicular strikes, truck bed injuries tend to be severe and multiple and include fractures and abrasions.^{1,a} A survey^a of veterinarians in Massachusetts found 141 practitioners (71% of those surveyed) had treated a total of 592 dogs that year that were injured as a result of riding in a truck bed. Data relating to dogs are limited, but data collected regarding human truck bed passengers indicate they are at significantly greater risk of injury² and death³ than passengers riding in the cab. Riding in a truck bed may place dogs in contact with shifting loads sufficient to cause injuries and, if the truck bed is uncovered, expose them to road dust, debris, and heated metal surfaces.

ALTERNATIVES

Ejection from a truck bed may be prevented by use of a tether, however this introduces risks of tangling, choking, or dragging behind the vehicle. Any tether used should be short enough to retain the dog's front and hind legs within the truck and should be combined with a tractable surface to allow the dog to remain easily within the range of the tether while the truck is in motion.

Dogs may be confined to a truck bed in a secure cage or kennel, but attention must be paid to ensuring appropriate space (sufficient to stand up and lie down, but not enough that the dog may be thrown from one side of the crate/kennel to the other), ventilation, and protection from the elements. Enclosures on a truck bed may accumulate toxic carbon monoxide⁴ and provide only limited protection in the event of an accident.³

Within the truck cab a dog is subject to the same risks as a human passenger, and a safety harness can limit the dog's ability to distract or interfere with the driver and may minimize injuries to both in the event of an accident.

LEGISLATION

Many states have banned traveling with dogs in the truck bed or require they be secured, others have legislation pending.

SUMMARY

Dogs transported in open truck beds are at risk of severe injury.

This peer-reviewed summary has been prepared by the American Veterinary Medical Association Animal Welfare Division. While principally a review of the scientific literature, it may also include information gleaned from proprietary data, legislative and regulatory review, market conditions, and scholarly ethical assessments. It is provided as information and its contents should not be construed as official AVMA policy. Mention of trade names, products, commercial practices or organizations does not imply endorsement by the American Veterinary Medical Association.

© American Veterinary Medical Association

FOOTNOTES

a. Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, untitled 1997 document obtained via personal communication Jul 3 2007

REFERENCES

1. Houston DM, Fries CL, Alcorn AM, et al. Injuries suffered by dogs from riding in the back of open pickup trucks: a retrospective review of seventy cases. *Can Vet J* 1995;36:510-512.
2. Agran P, Diane M, Anderson C. Injuries to occupants in cargo areas of pickup trucks. *West J Med* 1994;161:479-482.
3. Anderson C, Agran P, Winn D, et al. Fatalities to occupants of cargo areas of pickup trucks. *Accid Anal Prev* 2000;32:533-540.
4. Hampson N, Norkool D. Carbon monoxide poisoning in children riding in the back of pickup trucks. *J Am Med Ass* 1992;267:538-540.