

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Clover Safe notes are intended primarily for 4-H volunteers and members nine years and older

#33 SHEEP SHEARING SAFETY



Photograph Courtesy of the University of California 4-H Archives

Available information indicates sheep shearing injuries typically affect the arms, back, and knees of the shearers⁽¹⁾. Types of injuries include strains/sprains, lacerations, and contusions due to the physical stress required to manipulate sheep and the inherent hazards associated with the sharp edges of a wool clipper.

Sheep can be also injured during the shearing process. Injuries to sheep often include cuts due to inattentive shearing practices or physical trauma due to sheep panicking and running into objects when they are being captured or released by shearers.

Many of the injuries to shearers and /or sheep are caused by shearers being careless or inattentive and could be prevented by taking several simple precautions.

Pre-Shearing Activities

- Before using, always inspect the wool clipper for damage or disrepair including examining the electrical cord and plug for defects. In addition, assure the blades are sharp and other wool clipper parts are not chipped, cracked, or broken.
- If the wool clipper fails your inspection, inform your group leader, parent, or guardian and remove it from use.
- Inspect the shearing work area: remove any obstructions and eliminate sharp edges and protrusions. Assure the shearing work area is well lit and ventilated.

Shearing Precautions

- When shearing sheep, wear appropriate personal protective equipment such as closed toed shoes, long pants, shirt, gloves, sunglasses, and sunscreen.
- If sheep movement is causing airborne dust in the shearing work area, use a dust mask.
- Avoid electrical shocks by not using an electric wool clipper in wet conditions.
- Consume an adequate amount of drinking water for the weather conditions.
- Use good posture when shearing sheep. Avoid stooping or semi-stooping positions whenever possible.
- If lifting is necessary, always lift with your legs. Find someone to assist you with lifting heavy loads.
- Keep the floor of the shearing work area dry to prevent slip injuries.
- Allow sheep to settle down before moving them to the shearing work area.
- Restrain and release sheep in a manner that reduces the possibility of the shearer being kicked, butted, or run into by the sheep.
- Prevent cuts to the animal's skin by taking your time while shearing and carefully clipping the wool so as to not get too close to the sheep's skin.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after touching sheep or any other animals.
- If you suffer an injury while shearing sheep, tell your group leader, parent, or guardian. Seek medical attention if the injury is serious.

(1) Culvenor, J., Cowley, S., Freeman, R., Harvey, J., Lawrance, M., McElroy, K., Payne, W., Pryor, J., Stuart, D., & Williams, R. 1997, 'The Ergonomics of Sheep Shearing', *Productivity Ergonomics and Safety: The Total Package, International Workplace Health & Safety Forum and 33rd Ergonomics Society of Australia Conference*, Gold Coast, November 1997, CD ROM. Available online at <http://www.culvenor.com>