



Latest newsletter update

2.30 pm, 22 February 2019 - Day 17

Advice on fire suppressant and animal health

While current evidence does not suggest any significant effects of fire suppressants on animals, the chemicals in the suppressants do break down once they are in the soil. One of the break down products is nitrate.

When it rains, pasture plants will take up nitrates just as they do after fertilisers containing nitrogen are applied.

This can cause spikes in nitrate levels in the plant material. High levels of nitrate can be toxic to livestock. However, given the short duration of application of the suppressant, the spike is unlikely to be any higher than normal application of diammonium phosphate fertiliser.

We encourage you to be vigilant and recommend the following:

- having feeds and forages analysed for nitrate when in doubt, such as drought-stressed, small-grain forages;
- observing stock frequently;
- feeding hungry stock on dry hay or mature grass before allowing free access to immature cereal crops or root-crop tops;
- not grazing stock on forages that are potentially dangerous;
- feeding only well-dried cereal hays;
- preventing hungry stock from gorging recently sprayed weeds;
- preventing hungry stock from gorging highly fertilised crops;
- not overstocking risky pastures / grazing crops – overstocking can result in more stalk material being consumed (the stalk contains the most nitrate in the plant). Avoid strip grazing for the same reason;
- not grazing high-nitrate pastures or crops for 7 days after periods of rainfall, cloudy days, frosts, or high temperatures that cause wilting;
- grazing stock on high-nitrate pastures or crops during sunny afternoons (when the temperature is above 15°C) and removing them at night. This reduces the amount of high-nitrate forage consumed and helps rumen microbes to adapt;
- preventing access to high-risk weeds around yards/sheds;
- feeding risky material in small amounts diluted with safe feed, preferably high-carbohydrate feed such as grain (if accustomed to grain feeding), and gradually increasing the amount fed – this applies only to ruminants;
- ensuring that water does not contain high levels of nitrates;
- not feeding green chop that has heated after cutting;
- never feeding mouldy hay.

If fire suppressants have entered your water tanks – the water may taste salty and unpleasant. It is not suitable for humans or animals to drink. Your tanks may have to be flushed out.

If you have any concerns, we recommend you contact your veterinarian.