

RCVS Position On The Disbudding Of Goats

From the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)

We have clarified the legal position regarding the disbudding of goats, following recent media reports concerning undercover filming on UK goat farms.

The carrying out of any activity which amounts to veterinary surgery is restricted to veterinary surgeons unless there is a suitable exemption that allows other people to do it.

The removal of the horn-bud of goats (disbudding) is considered veterinary surgery under the provisions of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (the Act).

Schedule 3 of the Act provides certain exemptions to the restriction on carrying out veterinary surgery, such as those allowing veterinary nurses and student veterinary nurses to undertake any medical treatment or any minor surgery (not involving entry into a body cavity) in certain circumstances.

However, Schedule 3 specifically provides that these exemptions do not allow non-veterinary surgeons to undertake the disbudding of goats, except the trimming of the insensitive tip of an in-growing horn which, if left untreated, could cause pain or distress.

There are no other Exemption Orders covering the disbudding of goats and therefore this procedure may only be undertaken by veterinary surgeons.

The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007, the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (Wales) Regulations 2007 and the Prohibited Procedures on Protected Animals (Exemptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2007 all include disbudding of goats as a procedure which can be carried out for non-therapeutic reasons. However, this secondary legislation is subject to the restrictions in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 and therefore disbudding of goats is restricted to veterinary surgeons.

The Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures By Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 currently include disbudding of goats as a procedure which may be carried out by non-veterinary surgeons. However, the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 applies to Northern Ireland and the Regulations are scheduled to be amended later in 2012. This will make it clear that only veterinary surgeons may disbud goats in the UK.

The secondary legislation in the UK does not explicitly require anaesthetic to be administered when disbudding goats. However, disbudding should be carried out by veterinary surgeons in accordance with good practice and in such a way as to minimise pain and suffering caused to the animal, which should include use of an anaesthetic.

In summary, only a veterinary surgeon may undertake the disbudding of goats and due to the nature of the procedure, veterinary surgeons disbudding goats should administer anaesthetic.