

ENGLAND &
WALES **BEST
PRACTICE
GUIDES**

Deer and vehicle collisions.

Culling Deer





Introduction

At least 74,000 deer are injured on roads in the UK each year.

Many are killed, some disappear to die later, but a significant proportion are injured and remain alive at the scene. Such animals may suffer badly and are a potential further hazard to road users.

Often the only reasonable course is to humanely

dispatch the animal as soon as it is safe to do so.

This guide describes how to cope with injured deer at the roadside in a humane, safe and legal manner and is relevant to members of humane dispatch schemes as well as to individuals who occasionally have to deal with deer vehicle collisions (DVCs).

Humane dispatch schemes

In some areas there are schemes designed and run by organisations other than the police but still called out from the police control room, other areas are run by the police.

Vetting and training are carried out before volunteers can operate.

Volunteers are required to have:.

- The necessary experience and/or qualifications and training to deal with an incident in an efficient, safe, humane and legal way. Specialist training will be done by the police and an external award may also be required.
- Suitable firearms with certificate conditions to allow for the humane dispatch of deer.

- The means and desire to reliably respond to a call out as agreed.

- Adequate means of communications from remote places e.g. mobile phone.

- Adequate insurance providing third party cover.

Carcass disposal is normally dealt with by local authorities or Highways agencies, but in some cases the volunteer may be asked to remove it, in which case a legal means of disposal will be required.

Volunteers are not usually paid for attending an incident, but mileage may be claimed in some areas.

Safety equipment may be provided in some areas.

Planning

Whatever the reason for your presence in the first place, each incident needs to be dealt with in a manner designed to protect human safety in the first instance, then reduce the suffering of the animal.

Planning for an incident will save time and make you more efficient on arrival.

Equipment

If you expect to be regularly called out to deal with DVCs then assembling a “grab bag” with all of the equipment you expect to need is a good idea.

Firearms and ammunition, of course, will need to be collected from secure storage as required (see Choice of Method below for list of suitable firearms).

The equipment list (excluding firearms) might include:

- Hi-vis clothing, yellow (at least a class 3 long sleeved hi-vis jacket with reflective tape)
- Amber flashing beacon for vehicles
- Powerful torch
- Knife with locking or fixed blade of around 12cm long
- Means of lifting heavy carcass
- Vehicle for carcass transport and safe storage of firearms
- Means of pinpointing location (What-3-Words, GPS etc.)
- Means of recording or reporting
- Mobile Phone

The call out

You may be informed of a DVC by the Police, a third party or come across an incident yourself.

Never use a firearm on the highway without the approval of a police officer.

Location and other information

Call outs from police control rooms will normally send you a text with all the information you will require such as location (usually using What3Words), incident number, date & time.



It is unlikely that specifics such as what species of deer has been involved will be known initially, but the numbers involved may well be shared. Be prepared to ask for as much information as possible as this will help you with your approach on arrival at the incident.

Actions before dispatch

Having made certain of your own safety and that your vehicle is in a safe place and if necessary in a position that will protect you when working, you will have to rapidly assess the following factors:

- Safety of other road users and potential dangers from traffic.
- Presence of onlookers and how to explain what is happening and keep them clear.
- Whether assistance is needed.
- Location of deer on highway, verge or adjacent land.
- Status of deer (how many, alive, dead, mobile, incapacitated) and is a quick recovery likely (there is a general presumption that any deer involved in a DVC, especially if immobile at the scene, will not recover).
- Your plan for safe dispatch including safe backstop and hearing protection if firearms are to be used.
- Your plan for removal/disposal of carcass.
- Other complications due to the situation.

When the police are present, it is their job to prioritise traffic and members of the public.

They will look to the volunteer for information specific to the dispatch of the deer.

The volunteer must share details of their plan, such as when a firearm will be used, how it will be used and notification once the dispatch is complete.

In certain situations, you may decide that nothing can be done because it would endanger yourself or others. In this case, inform the Police and those present explaining why.

The condition of the injured animal is a major consideration when planning and carrying out humane dispatch.

Often the first consideration is that the deer may be a hazard to yourself or others, especially other road users.

Dead deer are straightforward to deal with as long as they are not too heavy to move. If they are on the carriageway, they should be removed to the verge provided it is safe to do so.

Mobile deer may have to be encouraged into a safe area before deciding what to do.

If dispatch is necessary, it may not be possible to get close to the animal, a rifle or shotgun may have to be used at further ranges, in which case extreme care should be taken to ensure a safe shot.

If the injured animal runs from the road and onto private land all reasonable efforts should be made to consult the landowner as to their preferred course of action. Without permission there may be a claim of trespass, regardless of motive, this could be particularly serious if a firearm was involved. Acting on a request from the police may provide reasonable excuse.

If an injured animal disappears into cover the use of a trained dog on a leash should be considered and again the landowner must be consulted.

In any case you should not move any carcass without the owner's consent.

Immobile live deer may have to be moved to a safe area before dispatch but this should be done with the minimum of stress to the animal.

Humane dispatch

The method that you chose will depend on the situation.

Legally, any method is acceptable to prevent suffering provided that it brings about a quick death, is appropriate to the circumstances and that to kill the animal would be an act of mercy.

There are, however, preferred methods for deer which are listed below:



Shotguns

A 12 bore shotgun is the preferred method of dispatch for most humane dispatch scenarios, and can be used on immobile animals as well as more mobile deer depending on the cartridge choice.

There is a large choice of ammunition available, from very small dust shot/safe shot cartridges that rarely exit the carcass and are completely inert after 3 meters, through to larger loads of shot such as no3, no2, no1 and AAA shot which are better suited to animals further away. When using a larger size shot, care must be taken to consider what is behind any target because of potential ricochets when shooting near hard surfaces such as tarmac and concrete.

Smaller gauge/calibre shotguns such as the .410 are suitable at very close range on immobile deer due to their reduced penetration. However, they are less versatile than the 12 bore given the restrictions in cartridge and shot sizes available.

Rifles

Centrefire rifles can be used for humane dispatch but are better suited to situations where a shot will be taken from further away, such as when dealing with mobile or semi-mobile deer.

Extreme care must be taken to ensure that a safe backstop is present before taking any shot.

Rimfire rifles may also be suitable in certain situations.

When using a rifle fitted with a scope at extremely close ranges, alterations in point of aim will be needed. Due to the height of the scope above the bore of the barrel, a bullet will most likely strike several inches low when aiming directly using the crosshairs. To correct this, aiming several inches high through the scope will allow the bullet to strike correctly. Practicing this on a range beforehand is key to figuring out how your rifle and scope combination works at different ranges.

Knife

Knives may be used in very specific scenarios and only with totally immobile deer.

If this method is decided on, a knife with a blade of around 12cm is considered appropriate. The deer must be totally secured to minimise the risk of accidents.

The preferred method of dispatch using a knife is thoracic sticking, as when bleeding a shot deer. Insert the knife above the sternum and cut side to side to sever the blood vessels at the top of the heart.

If this is unsuitable for the situation, severing the carotid and jugular vessels in the neck is an acceptable method of dispatch. The knife should be inserted behind the jawbone on both sides, before cutting towards the front of the throat.

Other methods

Other methods of dispatch might include the use of pistols or other devices for humane slaughter such as captive bolt killers.

Whilst not commonly used, they can be appropriate for the dispatch of some deer at the roadside.

Both rely on the animal being immobile and at very close range, with captive bolt killers requiring additional steps



to ensure a humane dispatch such as bleeding or “pithing” (inserting a rod into the hole caused by the bolt to destroy the brain).

Note that for firearms the preferred point of aim is the head, from the front, at the intersection between two lines drawn from the eye to the top of the opposite ear.

If it is possible, angle the shot through this point of aim and then into the neck and body.

Often it may not be possible to obtain a frontal shot but the brain, which is high in the head of deer should still be the target.

Both the rifle and 12 bore shotgun with AAA or larger shot have the advantage that they can be used if a previously immobile animal moves further away or cannot be approached closely, this is not the case with other methods.

Small shotgun shot, including SafeShot (to be used only at very close range) tends not to exit the skull thus lessening ricochet risk in restricted areas.

Firearms must be kept secure at all times.

When using firearms on or over rights of way or near buildings you must do so without committing the offences of trespass with a firearm or possessing a firearm and ammunition with the intent to endanger life (Sec 16 Firearms Act 1968).

It is an offence without lawful authority or excuse to discharge a firearm within fifty feet of the centre of a highway and in consequence of which a user of the highway is injured, interrupted or endangered (sec 161 Highways Act 1980).

A request from the police to attend and deal with a DVC should ensure that both lawful authority and excuse exist.

Obtaining an incident number while part of a police approved scheme may give similar reassurance.

Removal of carcass

- First, the carcass must not present a danger to road users. It is the responsibility of the Police to maintain road safety but simply moving the carcass off of the carriageway will help.
- Carcasses on the side of the road are the responsibility of the Highways Authority, or the Local Authority who should be informed, giving a precise location, if you are unable or unwilling to dispose of the carcass yourself.
- If other landowners are involved their permission should be sought.
- Road accident carcasses are not permitted to go into the food chain so disposal will have to be by approved means.
- If a vet has attended the scene and administered a lethal injection the vet must ensure that the carcass is disposed of by approved means.

Personal hygiene

Deer involved in collisions are often badly damaged or may be diseased. You should take sensible precautions when handling them and ensure that any equipment is cleaned before being used for other carcasses.

Biosecurity

If you are dealing with DVCs during an outbreak of a notifiable disease such as Foot and Mouth there may be restrictions on what you can do and you may have to employ strict bio-security measures.

Advice will be found on the Deer Initiative and DEFRA websites.

If you suspect a notifiable disease, you must inform the relevant authorities.

Notification and records

Most Humane Animal Dispatch schemes require you to complete online or app based records of every call-out. If not, it is still advisable to keep a record which should include:

- Date
- Location (preferably a 6 figure map reference)

- A Police incident number (obtainable from the local control room)
- Details of injured deer
- Means of dispatch
- Means of disposal
- Any other relevant information

Insurance

Volunteers who operate within police run schemes will be covered by police insurance.

For volunteers operating outside of police run schemes, insurance is available from several of the main shooting organisations. Check with the organisation before attending any call-out that the insurance offered covers the humane dispatch of deer.

Further Information

- **Deer collisions website**
<https://www.deercollisions.co.uk>