

# Livestock also suffer traffic accidents during transport

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Livestock also suffer traffic accidents during transport. Credit: Genaro Miranda de la Lama.

A Spanish study has analysed traffic accidents involving cattle being transported for human consumption in the country for the first time. Despite the "relatively" low mortality rate, animals suffer high-risk situations that cause pain and stress. The scientists say that specific protocols for action are needed with regard to these accidents, and to prepare the emergency services to deal with them.

Most of the 86 lorry accidents identified from 2000 to 2009 in [Spain](#) involved the transportation of pigs (57%), followed by [cattle](#) (30%), [chickens](#) (8%), and [sheep](#) (5%). Despite the scale of the incidents, the mortality rate among the animals was 22% for the pigs and 12% for

[cows](#), which are "relatively low" figures.

"However, in 70% of the accidents involving pigs, the animals ended up wandering around on the road, posing a risk to [road safety](#) and potentially causing other accidents", lead author Genaro Miranda de la Lama, and Gustavo María, both researchers at the Department of Animal Production and Food Science at the University of Zaragoza (UNIZAR), tell SINC.

The study, which has been published in the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, shows that accidents pose a greater risk to animal welfare. "Animals have not evolved to be programmed to cope with a road accident, meaning they suffer stress, anxiety, fear, pain and uncertainty, which can endanger other animals and people", explains Miranda de la Lama.

Although the transportation of livestock in Spain is "extensively" regulated by national regulations and European legislation, "it would be of great use to develop specific, scientifically-technically based protocols for action that would make it possible to deal with the various kinds of accidents, says María.

Depending on the autonomous region in which an accident occurs, the surviving animals are either killed in situ, or are re-loaded in order to be taken to the abattoir. Miranda de la Lama says "this should be standardised, putting animals with particularly painful injuries such as exposed fractures out of their misery and re-transporting the apparently less injured ones". The advice of experts with particular training on this issue is needed in order to do this.

Tired drivers are the main cause

Pigs are one of the most-transported animals due to the heavy

consumption demand for pork products in Spain and Europe, and this means they are the most exposed to [traffic accidents](#), in which 6% of the drivers lose their lives.

The study, which obtained information from news items published in the press over the past 10 years, also shows that 23% of the accidents involved other vehicles, causing the deaths of 41 people.

The main cause of the accidents seems to be driver tiredness as a result of their long working days, poorly-devised routes, and highly-demanding jobs. With [pigs](#), transport is in general handled by integrated companies that have a high level of logistical development, but which are under constant pressure due to the enormous commercial competition, which often affects drivers' conduct.

In the case of cattle, lorry drivers are self-employed hauliers with a "very basic" level in terms of logistics and route planning. Drivers do not usually take part in the training and safety programmes that large companies provide.

In order to prevent accidents, the researchers explain that rest times and driver relief should be better respected, and routes better planned. The development of specific training programmes for hauliers and the [emergency services](#) staff attending these [accidents](#) is "very necessary".

Learning about how to handle animals and their behaviour and reactions in situations of pain and suffering would also minimise the consequences for animal welfare and human safety.

**More information:** Miranda de la Lama, Genaro C.; Sepulveda, Wilmer S.; Villarroel, Morris; María, Gustavo A. "Livestock Vehicle Accidents in Spain: Causes, Consequences, and Effects on Animal Welfare" *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare* 14(2): 109-123, 2011.

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