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Animal Health Fact Sheet

HALOGETON TOXICITY IN CATTLE

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"Everyone" knows that halogeton is toxic to sheep, but sometimes we forget that it is also toxic for cattle. If cattle eat enough of it, it will kill them. One autumn incident resulted in the death of over 40 head of cows in a multiple owner grazing herd.

When the case history is reviewed, halogeton poisoning (sheep or cattle) could almost always have been prevented IF something had been done just a little different. That something is usually associated with water intake (thirst), hunger, and access to heavy stands of halogeton. The example incident is a classic example.

The cattle had been in one large grazing area, but with minimal feed availability due to drought conditions. They were gathered one afternoon and moved to another grazing "pasture" closer to the working corrals. They were also watered during this moving process and then allowed to spread freely in the new "pasture" of dried, crested wheat grass.

There was one major problem; a heavy stand of halogeton was located not far from the water troughs. A second major problem was that no one thought about the halogeton. So, the partially hungry, thirsty cattle had a drink, walked away from the water and felt even more hungry than before and found themselves standing in a patch of tall, not-so-bad-tasting forage. Some just took a few mouthfuls and walked on out to the crested wheatgrass. But others ate a lot, and by the next morning they began to die.

IF all the cattle had just been pushed away from that one big stand of halogeton, right after watering, there would probably have been no death loss. They would have satisfied their hunger on the dried grasses and lived happily ever after.

If you have halogeton on your ranges, remember:

- 1. Know the location of major patches (even mark them with red flags), and
- 2. Keep hungry sheep or cattle away from those sites; especially right after they have watered or immediately after a rain or snowstorm.

Full ruminants can tolerate moderate amounts of halogeton, especially after they have been feeding on small amounts for a few weeks. However, once they begin to show signs of illness, treatment usually doesn't change the course of the intoxication very much.