



Sheep and
Livestock
worrying
Quick Guide

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Livestock worrying

It is a criminal offence under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 to allow a dog on any land containing livestock unless the dog is under control. The Order defines 'under control' as 'restrained by a chain or other sufficient leash held by a person exercising proper control over the dog'. The Order also states that if a dog worries sheep (attacks or kills sheep or chases them in a way that may cause injury, suffering or financial loss to their owner) the person in charge of that dog is guilty of an offence. The penalty for this offence is a fine of up to £1000.

What harm can Livestock worrying do?

Chasing by dogs can cause serious damage to sheep, even if the dog doesn't catch them. The stress of worrying by dogs can cause sheep to die and pregnant ewes to miscarry their lambs.

Sheep fleeing from dogs are often killed or seriously injured by their panicked attempts to escape, damaging fences and field boundaries in the process.

Dog bites can cause death in sheep, necessitate them to be put down at a later date or result in considerable veterinary bills.

What can dog owners do to stop their dogs worrying livestock?

If you're walking in rural areas **keep your dog on a lead** at all times - especially if there are grazing sheep about.

Keep a check on fences and gates in order to keep your garden as secure as possible to prevent dogs getting out.

Seek a dog trainer to educate your dog on how to behave around sheep and other livestock.

Having your dog's favourite toy or ball with you when you go out may also make it be easier to divert their attention away from sheep.

What can the farmer do?

Farmers should check stock regularly, maintain walls, fences and hedges with the aim of making it more difficult for dogs to gain access to fields where livestock are grazing.

They should alert other farmers in the area if loose dogs are sighted near livestock.

Farmers should preserve attacked livestock for forensic examination. This can secure key evidence to identify the dogs involved. Take photographs and video footage of the attack and attacked livestock, the whole scene if possible as well as detailed close-ups and eartag numbers. If possible, obtain a veterinary examination - expert medical evidence is useful for any subsequent prosecutions.

All incidents of sheep and livestock worrying should be reported to Local Dog Wardens as and when they occur. This is to ensure accurate data is collected to get a better understanding of the scale of the issue and deploy resources. The Dog Warden will then conduct an investigation. Reporting to PSNI is not required unless a criminal offence has been committed.

Some key points of legislation affecting dogs around sheep in Northern Ireland

Under the **Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983**, members of the public are not allowed onto open country (mountains, moors, heathland, hills, woodland, cliffs, foreshore, marsh, bog or waterway) with a dog that is not under proper control. This is made clear in the **A Guide to Public Rights of Way and Access to the Countryside** published by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency'.

The **Countryside Code for Northern Ireland** stresses that dogs should be kept under control and kept on leads when walking on roads or near farm animals. The Code also asks dog owners to bear in mind the distress that dogs can cause to farm animals.

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