

Safety Note #71

BRANDING IRON SAFETY



Photograph Courtesy of Sierra Foothill REC

Ownership of livestock is often established by the use of a branding iron. Traditionally, fire-heated branding irons were used to uniquely mark identification on the flank of livestock. At the present time, the popularity of electric branding irons has increased because of the greater availability of electricity and convenience of not having to provide a thermal source to warm a fire-heated branding iron. California Code of Regulations Title 8, Section 3203 (7) requires employees be trained on the equipment they use in the workplace.

Pre-Use Activities

- Thoroughly review and understand information provided in the branding iron operator's manual with particular attention given to descriptions of safety procedures.
- Before using, always inspect the branding iron for damage or disrepair. For an electric branding iron, inspect the electrical cord and plug for defects.
- If a branding iron fails the pre-use inspection, notify your supervisor and remove the branding iron from service by attaching a red tag that states "DO NOT USE." Complete red tag with appropriate information.

Operating Precautions

- As necessary, wear boots, gloves, long pants, and eye and head protection when conducting livestock branding operations.
- Do not wear loose clothing or jewelry in the vicinity of livestock branding operations. Tie back long hair or wear under a cap or hard hat.
- Prior to branding, clip long livestock hair in the target branding area.
- Never conduct electric branding in wet conditions or while you or the animal are standing in mud or water.
- Use moderate pressure when applying a branding iron. Apply the branding iron about 10 seconds until the animal's skin turns a dark coppery color.
- Always set a heated branding iron on a stand or clean non-thermal conductive or non-flammable surface.
- Never set an electric branding iron in dirt or other substances that may cause it to overheat.
- Avoid startling or spooking cattle during branding operations.
- Be alert and aware of potential sudden changes in conditions when handling livestock.
- Always utilize good animal husbandry practices when handling livestock.
- If an electric shock is experienced when using an electric branding iron, immediately discontinue use of the iron.

Note: Portions of Safety Note #71 were developed from information provided by L & H Branding Irons, Mandan, North Dakota