businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Livestock transport vehicles

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

Although the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) in 2021, certain pieces of legislation (known as 'assimilated law') continue to apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation, revoked or permitted to expire. This means that our guidance still contains references to legislation that originated from the EU.

This guidance is for Scotland

Vehicles that transport animals are required to be designed, constructed, maintained and operated so as to avoid injury and suffering, and to ensure the safety of the animals transported in them. Requirements apply to transport of animals by road, rail, vessels and aircraft.

The legislation applies to persons who transport live vertebrate animals, which includes farm livestock (cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, deer and horses), in connection with an economic activity (in other words, a business or trade).

Principal requirements

The welfare of animals during transport is protected by assimilated Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 *on the protection of animals during transport and related operations*. This is brought into law in Scotland by the Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Scotland) Regulations 2006. The law requires that vehicles and loading / unloading facilities be designed, constructed, maintained and operated so as to:

- Avoid injury and suffering, and to ensure the safety of the animals
- Protect the animals from inclement weather, extreme temperatures and adverse changes in climate

conditions
- Allow cleansing and disinfection
- Prevent the animals escaping or falling out, and be able to withstand the stresses of movements
- Provide barriers to prevent animals falling when loading or unloading
- Ensure that air quality and quantity appropriate to the species transported can be maintained
- Provide access to the animals to allow them to be inspected and cared for
- Present a flooring surface that is anti-slip
- Present a flooring surface that minimises the leakage of urine or faeces
- Provide a means of lighting sufficient for inspection and care of the animals during transport and during loading / unloading

Sufficient space must be provided inside the animals' compartment and at each of its levels. This is to ensure that there is adequate ventilation above the animals when they are in a naturally standing position, without on any account hindering their natural movement.

Sufficient ventilation must be provided to ensure that the needs of the animals are fully met.

Partitions must be used where necessary to provide support or to prevent animals being thrown about. When they are used, they must:

- Be positioned to prevent injury or unnecessary suffering
- Be of rigid construction, strong enough to withstand animal weight
- Be constructed and positioned so as not to interfere with ventilation
- Have fittings designed for quick and easy operation

Vehicles used to transport livestock must be clearly and visibly marked with signs indicating the presence of live animals.

Vehicles must carry suitable equipment for loading and unloading.

Ramps must not be steeper than an angle of 20 degrees (36.4% to the horizontal) for pigs, calves and horses; and an angle of 26 degrees 34 minutes (50% to the horizontal) for sheep and cattle other than calves.

Where the slope is steeper than 10 degrees (17.6% to the horizontal) ramps must be fitted with a system such as that provided by foot battens, which ensure that the animals climb or go down without risks or difficulties.

Lifting platforms and upper floors must have safety barriers, in order to prevent animals falling or escaping during loading and unloading operations.

Suitable provision must be made so that animals may be tied to the interior of the vehicle; however, animals must not be tied by the horns or nose ring. Ropes or other attachments must be sufficiently strong not to break and designed to eliminate danger of strangulation or injury; they must also be long enough to allow the animal to lie down and to eat and drink, if necessary. Fittings should be quick release.

Additional requirements apply to vehicles transporting livestock for over eight hours. Such vehicles must also be inspected and approved by a body approved by the competent authority (a list of certifying bodies in the vehicle inspection and approval scheme* is available on the GOV.UK website).

[*The GOV.UK web page states that it applies to England only, but this particular section is applicable GB-wide.]

Further construction requirements also apply to means of animal transport by air, in containers, livestock vessels and vessels transporting sea containers. More information on welfare during transportation in relation to these requirements is available on the Scottish Government website.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: June 2026

Key legislation

- Animal Health Act 1981
- Assimilated Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 *on the protection of animals during transport and related operations*
- Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Scotland) Regulations 2006

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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