

**SOCIETY ADVICE**

**SAFEGUARDING THE WELFARE OF DOGS AND SHEEP**

**The Society’s charitable objects include -**

* Promoting responsible working sheepdog ownership, breeding and training.
* Promoting matters pertaining to dog welfare in general.

The International Sheep Dog Society rules for trials (5.1i) states that “Judges are empowered to direct any competitor showing insufficient merit to retire, bearing in mind the ***necessity to safeguard the welfare of the dogs and sheep****”.*

This is the Society’s primary responsibility and priority.

Animal rights protesters, influencers on social media and others using video clips etc. are taking an increasing interest in sheep dog trials promoting the view that they are cruel to both dogs and sheep.

This applies to footage taken at trials and clips taken from videos of dogs for sale or during training etc.

The Society needs to ensure that there are no adverse incidents and no other opportunity to produce potentially critical reports.

This advice is to help handlers / trial organisers mitigate any associated risks and to help respond, if approached by members of the public to explain what actions have been taken to ensure the welfare of dogs and sheep.

As summers are getting warmer the Society is also concerned to ensure that the welfare of both dogs and sheep at trials is safeguarded in extreme weather.

All the Society’s trials (championships and nurseries) will follow this policy. Affiliated Trial Societies are strongly recommended to follow the same advice.

The Society will ***not*** ***insure*** the sheep used at a trial if this advice has not been followed.

It will be included in the Society’s notes for trials in the members diary.

**Handlers**

First and foremost, responsibility for the welfare of their dogs and sheep used in trials or training rests with handlers ***in all circumstances***.

Handlers know their dogs capabilities and are best placed to ***decide when to retire their dog*** during a trial or training session because it is fatigued / struggling with the heat or is harassing the sheep.

Handlers should ***be watchful at all times***.

The Society’s entry criteria for trials notes that “Individual handlers are responsible for the welfare (including possible injury) and conduct of their dogs and ***must carry out their own risk assessment of the tasks asked of their dogs during the trial*** e.g. deciding whether their dog(s) are fully fit to run the trial course and are kept under control and supervision at all times”.

Handlers should ***consider all the relevant risks***to their dog(s) including those arising from extreme heat.

**Trial Judges**

Bearing in mind the ***necessity to safeguard the welfare of the dogs and sheep,*** judges ***should not hesitate*** to ask a handler to retire should this be indicated regardless of whatever other safeguards are in place.

***Ultimately this may mean having to override a handler who has decided to continue his run.***

**Temperature**

***If the temperature during a trial is expected to exceed 30°C*** at some point during the day ***a decision must be made to postpone or suspend the trial until the temperature reduces.***

This temperature may appear arbitrary but it is informed by the best current advice and does provide a reasonable baseline. It is also acknowledged that dogs have differing levels of fitness and conditioning but this is no reason not to establish a common baseline.

It is based on the best available expert opinion, veterinary advice and the assessed risks associated with extreme heat.

When is it too hot for dogs? Heatstroke can happen at any time of the year, but since some dogs are less able to cool themselves down it’s difficult to say which temperatures are safe. ***Most working dogs are comfortable at temperatures between 15-25°C.***

Dogs that are not acclimatised to hot weather, such as during a heatwave, or those that have travelled from a cooler location to a warmer one, are also more likely to be affected by heatstroke.

**Dogs**

All dogs showing any sign(s) of fatigue for whatever reason e.g. leaving their sheep, seeking shelter etc. ***should be retired from their run.***

A water tub ***should always be provided*** near the entrance to the course.

When the ***temperature is between 25°C and 30°C*** competing dogs/sheep should be allowed a minute’s rest close to the post (ring) following the drive when the ***course time limit exceeds 10 minutes*** e.g. large courses, double fetch courses, national style course etc.

It may also be decided that handlers keep their points up to the point they need to retire or the judge calls them off in the best interests of the dog or sheep.

**Sheep**

In all cases, if the sheep are being harassed, gripped etc. by a dog the handler should be asked ***to retire immediately.***

Adequate shade should always be provided with a constant supply of water available to sheep held in pens (keep and exhaust).

**Heat Stroke in dogs (veterinary advice)**

Signs of **heat stroke** can progress quickly and can include: ***stiffness or an unwillingness to move; dribbling; confusion; being sick, can be bloody; upset stomach, can be bloody; not walking in a straight line; collapse; fitting.***

If a dog is thought to have heatstroke it is vital that a vet is contacted while cooling them down. Getting early advice and treatment is essential to saving a dog’s life. UK research has found that in the UK, although [1 in 7 dogs](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-66015-8) that are taken to vets with heatstroke die, [98% that are seen early with mild signs](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-86235-w) are likely to survive.

***It is important that dogs are cooled down as soon as possible - this can make a big difference to whether they survive***

Stop them exercising, move them out of the heat and into the shade; call a vet for advice; lay them down on a cool floor; offer them small amounts of water to drink; carefully pour water over the dog’s body, or sponge them if water is limited. Particularly focus on their neck, tummy and inner thighs. Ideally continue to do this until their breathing returns to normal. Make sure the dog doesn’t inhale any water while trying to cool them down. Fan them with cool air or put them in an air-conditioned room or car if possible.

The impact of fanning them, or putting them somewhere that’s air-conditioned, will be greatest if they’re already wet.

Generally speaking, if a dog’s body temperature exceeds 103°F (39.4°C), it is considered abnormal or ***hyperthermic.*** Body temperatures above ***106°F (41°F)*** are most commonly associated with exposure to excessive external or environmental heat and are often referred to as heatstroke*.* ***The critical temperature*** where multiple organ failure and impending death occurs is around ***107°F to 109°F (41.2******°C to 42.7°C).***

***It was previously thought that rapidly cooling an affected dog could cause them to go into shock. This advice is now being questioned so seek advice from the vet.***

