

Using Dehorning Paste in Group Housing

Posted by Dave Lucas



Dehorning paste is caustic, but when used properly is very safe and animal well-being friendly. To prevent the paste from running into the animal's eyes or being rubbed onto other animals, most producers apply a ring of [Udder Balm](#), petroleum jelly or some other protective barrier around the horn bud prior to application. It's also a good idea to keep the animal indoors, out of rain and away from other animals for at least six hours.

That's the proper protocol for using dehorning paste. However, through on-farm ingenuity, some producers and calf managers apply duct tape to the animal's horn buds immediately after paste application to prevent contact with eyes or other animals. Although this isn't necessary if proper caustic paste application instructions are followed, we offer the following tips for maximum safety and effectiveness:

- Feed a suckling calf just before paste application and immediately after tape removal. A full, sleepy calf makes your job much easier.
- Wear protective gloves to apply both the paste and tape.
- Cut or tear off two pieces of tape – enough to cover the paste application site and a bit beyond – and place them in a crisscross pattern over each horn bud.
- Keep the calf out of rain for at least six hours. This rule applies with or without duct tape.
- Some managers wrap duct tape completely around the calf's head. This is not optimal as it can interfere with breathing or swallowing and is difficult and stressful to remove later.
- Remove tape after six hours. Some producers allow the duct tape to fall off on its own; however, experience with this is limited.
- Once the tape is removed, the application sites may still be damp. Allow application sites to dry completely before the calf goes outside or has contact with other animals.

Do *you* use duct tape for caustic paste disbudding?