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Downer Cows' Treatment May Be Illegal

[Chris Halsne](#)

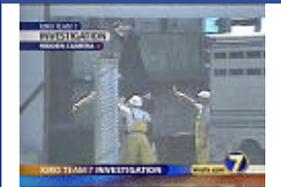
KIRO 7 Eyewitness News Investigative Reporter

The use of sick or crippled cows as a source for your food is the focus of a KIRO Team 7 Investigation this week.

Thursday, we first showed you how this high-risk meat enters a local slaughterhouse while federal inspectors stand by.

Now, we have disturbing new videotape.

Video



[Downer Cows Investigation, Part III](#)

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They're images that come with a warning: don't watch if you have a weak stomach.

KIRO Team 7 Investigative Reporter Chris Halsne witnessed what some experts are calling violations of the Humane Slaughter Act.

The use of what's called "downer meat" is allowed by law, but animal rights groups say food safety is just one concern.

Another is the treatment of the cows. Because downers can't walk into the plant, they are routinely shoved, dragged and hoisted while still alive.

Our video shows a typical downer. We took surveillance videotape of the Holstein at Midway Meats, a slaughterhouse near Olympia.

Unable to stand, the old dairy cow was dragged from its trailer into the parking lot. There it struggled in pain for about five minutes before being lifted off the ground by its neck.

Workers swung the wide-eyed, still kicking animal straight into the plant while a white-coated USDA meat inspector watched.

"See her. She's clearly still alive and suffering so much," says Bruce Friedrich.

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Friedrich works for PETA, a national animal rights organization.

"This is clearly egregious animal cruelty. If somebody did something like this to a dog or cat, people would go to jail."

PETA says, given the secret nature of the slaughterhouse industry, KIRO-TV's tape is rare. However, the mistreatment of downer cattle is routine.

"If there were an F-minus, protecting consumer safety and ensuring animals were slaughtered humanely, the USDA would get an F-minus," Friedrich says.

The Owner of MidWay Meats says "there are a certain number of motions that are just reflex."

He says farmers bring him downer cows -- already injured, sick or suffering. He says he puts them out of their misery, then usually turns the cow into hamburger.

"The animal is anesthetized so it is not feeling any pain ... no senses. At that point the animal is hoisted out of the vehicle and goes into the plant," says Bill Sexsmith, the owner of Midway Meats.

That might be the plan, but our videotape, at times, tells another story.

KIRO Team 7 Investigators witnessed either ineffective "stunning" or no stunning at all. We also recorded animals being dragged around by the neck.

Dr Lester Friedlander, a former USDA vet trainer, is one of America's top experts in the handling of downer cows.

"It sure doesn't say much that that's going to end up on your plate. When it's dragged across the ground, you see what kind of environment it's in ... feces, urine and mud ... then all of a sudden it's going to be fed to your kids," Dr. Friedlander says.

So where does this downer meat get sold? To be honest, consumers have no way of finding out. You could buy some downer hamburger just about anywhere.

A number of fast food and grocery store chains have policies against buying downer meat.



DOWNER COWS INVESTIGATION

 [Meat From Dying, Sick Or Diseased Cows Getting into Food](#)
Aired Oct. 31, 2002, 5 p. m.

 [Volatile Reaction From Viewers, Feds, To Meat Investigation](#)
Aired Oct. 31, 2002, 11 p. m.

 [Downer Cows' Treatment May Be Illegal](#)
Aired Nov. 1, 2002, 5 p. m.

 [Downer Industry Thrives Despite Consumers' Concerns](#)
Aired Nov. 1, 2002, 11 p. m.

 [New Revelations From Ex-State Ag Employee On Downer Cows](#)
Aired June 12, 2003, 5 p. m.

 [State Agencies Help Fund Attack On Downer Cow Investigations](#)
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However, our investigation discovered some of them are being misled by their meat suppliers. That will be the focus of an upcoming report.

If you want to comment on the use of downers to Congressional members on the Agriculture Committee, [send them an email](#).

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