

## Measures for Handling Velvet

### Hygiene Requirements

**Q: What does a clean-zone in my deer shed mean?**

**A:** Velvet antler can only be removed from stags within a clean zone. A clean-zone is defined as any area within your shed used for the removal, storage, handling, tagging, recording or freezing of velvet antler. This would generally be your crush or the pens that you remove velvet in and any areas where velvet is rested such as racks, benches and freezers. You can have more than one clean zone.

It is basically up to you to decide how big you want your clean zones to be, but any time you take velvet outside it, the velvet needs to be protected in clean receptacles.

**Q: Do I need to keep a record of the clean zones?**

**A:** Yes you do need to identify and record these areas. This can be a simple floor plan of the velvetting facilities with clean zones clearly marked that is kept with your velvetting records.

**Q: So I don't need to have my entire shed cleaned out?**

**A:** No. The hygiene requirements focus from the time that velvet is actually removed and the areas within the shed where the removal takes place, and velvet is handled.

**Q: Then what do I really need to do to get my facilities (clean-zones) up to requirements?**

**A:** All walls, doors, gates, benches and floors within the clean-zones should have a surface to allow easy wiping and or washing. As far as reasonably practical these areas should be able to be cleaned to a standard that doesn't allow the build-up of bacteria.

**Q: Does this mean I will have to cover my bare timber walls somehow?**

**A:** Yes bare timbers including bare plywood surfaces are not acceptable. These should be either painted or covered with a suitable substance that is capable of being hosed or washed down at the end of each velvetting session. Ideally if you wash the clean zones before starting it will make it easier to wash down again at the end of velvetting.

**Q: If I paint the walls does it have to be with white paint?**

**A:** No any colour paint (hi-gloss would be suitable) or plastic coated material is acceptable provided it's able to be washed or hosed clean. The smoother the surface the easier it will be to keep clean. The idea is to eliminate any areas where bacteria may accumulate.

**Q: Do I have to have concrete floors in the clean-zones?**

**A:** Not necessarily, however whatever flooring you have or use must be able to be washed clean and approved disinfectant applied after each session. Yes concrete floors are ideal however there are some sheds that have rubber compounds as permanent flooring and this flooring works very well. It is essential to minimise dust, faecal or mud contamination from the floor.

A tarpaulin spread out over a dirt floor or timber floor will not meet these new requirements. Floor surfaces can be either smooth or stamped provided they are able to be cleaned down.

**Q: What is an approved disinfectant and where can I get it from?**

**A:** Open this site. <http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz/registers-lists/maintenance-compounds/index.htm> Go to the box headed “Compound Name” then go to heading “Description” and click the dropdown box. Scroll down to “floor cleaners” click on this and it will open a list of options.

Easier still go to your rural provider store and ask for an “Approved Disinfectant” to wash your shed floor.

**NB** If “Non-Approved Disinfectants” or cleaning products have been used within the clean zones you must clean it with an approved disinfectant again prior to velvetting. Make sure it’s an “Approved Disinfectant” as auditors will verify this.

**Q: Do I need to clean the entire shed of bird droppings?**

**A:** No. You will need to take all practical steps to eliminate any droppings from falling onto or into clean zone areas. You should ensure the areas where bird droppings have accumulated over time are thoroughly cleaned prior to commencing the season. You should take whatever steps needed to discourage birds from these areas during the velvet season.

**Q: Explain what other surfaces are other than floors, walls and doors?**

**A:** Other surfaces are: storage racks used either for resting and cooling after removal and before being placed into a freezer, racks within a freezer, scales used for weighing velvet and benches within the clean zones. All of these surfaces must be kept clean and free of any contamination where bacteria may grow.

It’s also a good idea to minimise any potential contamination that can be brought into the immediate velvetting area (clean zones) such as mud from the outside yards. If there are any visible soiling on the velvet at velvetting, then give it a brush down to clean it.

**Q: What about my crush. How do I clean that?**

**A:** The same way as the rest of the clean zones. Your crush must be kept clean and free of any contaminants. Use the disinfectant on the crush at the end of each velvetting session. Any holes in the fabric or cover of the crush will need to be patched or repaired in such a way as it won’t harbour bacteria. Some crushes may need to be re-covered. If this looks likely then please don’t leave this until the season begins as you will be non-compliant.

**Q: Can I administer animal health products to my stag/s after velvetting and before releasing them to the paddocks?**

**A:** Yes, however, if you do this then the crush and the actual clean zone must be washed down before any other deer are velvetted. Please remember that all animal health treatments are used in accordance with the NVSBS manual or the ACVM Act 1999.

**Q: I’m feeling unwell but can I still go and velvet my stags?**

**A:** Velvetters must not handle any velvet if they have an infectious disease such as: Influenza, Chicken pox, measles, salmonellosis (food poisoning).

Velvetters are advised if cuts or abrasions are present on hands then rubber gloves should be worn. All wounds must be completely covered.

## Cold Chain Management

### **Q: Tell me about freezing my velvet.**

**A:** Thoroughly clean and disinfect your freezer/s prior to the season beginning. Your velvet must be placed into a freezer as soon as practicable, but no more than two (2) hours after being removed from the stag. Your freezer must have the capability of freezing down to minus 15°C or colder and you must be able to prove this.

### **Q: How can I prove that?**

**A:** You will need a thermometer or data logger to verify your freezer is capable of reaching minus 15°C. You don't need to have an electrician verify the temperature. There are a range of thermometers available from Hardware stores and mostly range in price from \$13 through to \$29 each. Some thermometers can be left inside the freezer and others attach to the outside wall of the freezer with a little probe on the inside. You can calibrate thermometers easily.

**Basic calibration.** The thermometer used should be calibrated using the ice point method at least each season.

1. Half fill a container (plastic bucket) with crushed ice. Add clean tap water until the container is full.
2. Put the thermometer stem or probe into the ice water so the sensing area is completely submerged. Wait 30 seconds or until the indicator stops moving.
3. If the temperature is at 0°C remove the thermometer. It is ready for use.
4. If the temperature is not at 0°C, the thermometer should be adjusted in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction until it reads 0°C. Alternatively the error in reading can be recorded on the temperature record sheet and the actual temperature recorded adjusted by the same. (i.e. if the thermometer display -1°C during calibration, 1°C should be added to each subsequent temperature reading until next calibration).

If you are buying a new freezer/s most common brands come standard on a factory setting of 4 on a scale of 1 to 6. A factory setting of 4 is capable of reaching -18°C, settings on 6 will reach minus 24°C. Some freezers have a digital readout showing the temperature.

### **Q: How long have I got for my velvet to reach minus 15°C?**

**A:** There is no time limit on farm. Provided your freezer can reach (and is set to achieve) minus 15°C or colder and you're able to verify this, then that's fine.

**Q: You say my freezer is to be included in the clean zones, what does this mean?**

**A:** Yes freezers are part of the clean zones and as such must be cleaned prior to any velvet being stored within it. They must be on a surface that is capable of being cleaned like other clean zones. They must be free of rust, dust, mud, bird and rodent droppings and importantly they must be designated velvet only areas. This means no other food or food products can be stored in the freezer with velvet.

If your freezer is in an outside shed and away from the main velvetting area then this area will also need to meet all requirements of clean zones.

**Q: You say that I can't have any other food product in my freezer yet the RCS says it can as long as there is separation?**

**A:** Yes that's correct the RCS does say that however that relates to "depots" and processing / exporting facilities only. The definition of depots in the RCS means a facility, that is not a farm, used to temporarily hold or facilitate the transfer of velvet. Processing and export facilities all operate under Risk Management Programmes (RMP). The new requirements for handling velvet on farms require velvet only freezers.

## Transport

**Q: Can I transport my velvet to the local collection depot?**

**A:** Yes of course, provided the velvet is transported in a clean container/s or clean one- trip bag/s it's not a problem. The velvet must remain in a frozen state at all times. On arrival at a depot the velvet must be placed into another freezer capable of reaching minus 15°C as soon as practical as and no more than 4hrs after being removed from the farm freezer. It must **not** be allowed to thaw out during the journey.

**Q: What happens when a velvet buyer calls to collect my velvet? Does my velvet have to be at a core temperature of minus 15°C**

**A:** No. There are no requirements to measure core temperatures of velvet at the farm. It just needs to be frozen, stay frozen and be back in a freezer within 4 hours.

## Traceability

**Q: So what new paperwork do I need to do?**

**A** It's a new requirement that every consignment of velvet going to a buyer is accompanied by a declaration from the seller that all requirements of the NVSB and the RCS have been observed. The requirements will be written up on Velvet Status Declaration (VSD) Forms. If you've already been using the VSD's nothing much changes but we will get new VSD form books relating to the RCS out to everyone before the next season.

Some velvet buyers will incorporate the required declarations that they get you to sign when sending them velvet already. If you're signing declarations on buyer's paperwork that says

you're velvetting in accordance with the NVSB and the RCS, then you don't need to fill out a VSD as well.

**Q: Do I still have to tag my velvet?**

**A:** Yes as always all velvet must be tagged as before. It's a legal requirement under the Animal Products Act 1999. It's also a requirement to keep a record of the tags used. There must be a system in place across the entire chain to show traceability of velvet sticks. The RCS requires a "one up" "one down" system which means a documented trail showing where velvet has come from and where it is going at all stages throughout the chain from removal to processing or export.

## Auditing

**Q: Who is going to audit / check that everyone is meeting these new standards?**

**A:** For NVSB members, the system continues as it always has, your supervising veterinarian will visit you annually and you can expect them to give you some advice on the new hygiene measures. The NVSB will then audit a sample of NVSB farmers to ensure compliance with the new standards. Anyone who fails that audit will be given an opportunity to remedy any failures before a re-audit. If there are still problems at re-audit, then MPI will be notified to follow up and your ability to remove velvet for export will come into question. MPI will assist in arranging audits on farms where velvetting is done by a veterinarian. These farms are subject to the same standards.

## Assistance

**Q:** Where can I go to get further advice on complying with the new standards?

**A:** Ask your local NZDFA Branch Chairman, call any of the NVSB committee members, call DINZ or ask your supervising veterinarian.

### NVSB committee

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