

My name is JoAnn Nichols, the Humane Investigator with the Humane Society of Chittenden County serving Chittenden and Grand Isle Counties. The position I hold is the only paid position with a humane society in Vermont that is dedicated to working on animal cruelty and neglect cases.

I am responsible for investigating animal cruelty complaints received in both Chittenden and Grand Isle Counties. In this capacity, I have handled over 500 animal cruelty cases since 2007. I also provide testimony for court hearing on animal cruelty cases.

I am a member of Vermont Humane Federation. I have served as the Cruelty Response System project coordinator, and have instructed courses in Investigating Animal Cruelty for Vermont Animal Control Officers, Health Officers, and Vermont law enforcement. I have served on the Board of Vermont Animal Control Association.

I currently serve on the Board of the Chittenden County Disaster Animal Response Team and the Vermont Disaster Animal Response Team. I also have been appointed by the Speaker of the House to sit on the Livestock Care and Standards Advisory Council. I have been the Animal Control Officer for the City of South Burlington for over 5 years.

I was trained at the Vermont Police Academy in Investigating Animal Cruelty in Vermont, and have instructed the section of that course relating to wildlife cruelty complaints. I have also attended the Professional Animal Cruelty and Advanced Investigator trainings at the University of Missouri's National Animal Cruelty Investigation School. I am a licensed wildlife rehabilitator and am qualified as a correctional officer in the State of Vermont.

I am in support of H. 254.

I have investigated situations where livestock have been living in substandard and inhumane conditions, however there was nothing actionable within the current statute that could be done to help the animals or improve their situation.

I would like to share with you two cases where H. 254 could have been a useful tool to prevent injury and inhumane treatment, or at least stop the inhumane treatment before it caused serious injury and suffering to the animals.

## 2 Cows and a Bull.

These animals were owned by a couple who had them as pets. They kept the cattle on their remote property which they said was part of the Current Use Program.

The original concern was that someone heard mooing in the woods. As the case developed it was apparent the owners could not provide appropriate care.

**COW #1**



Shed that was used as shelter has fallen down.



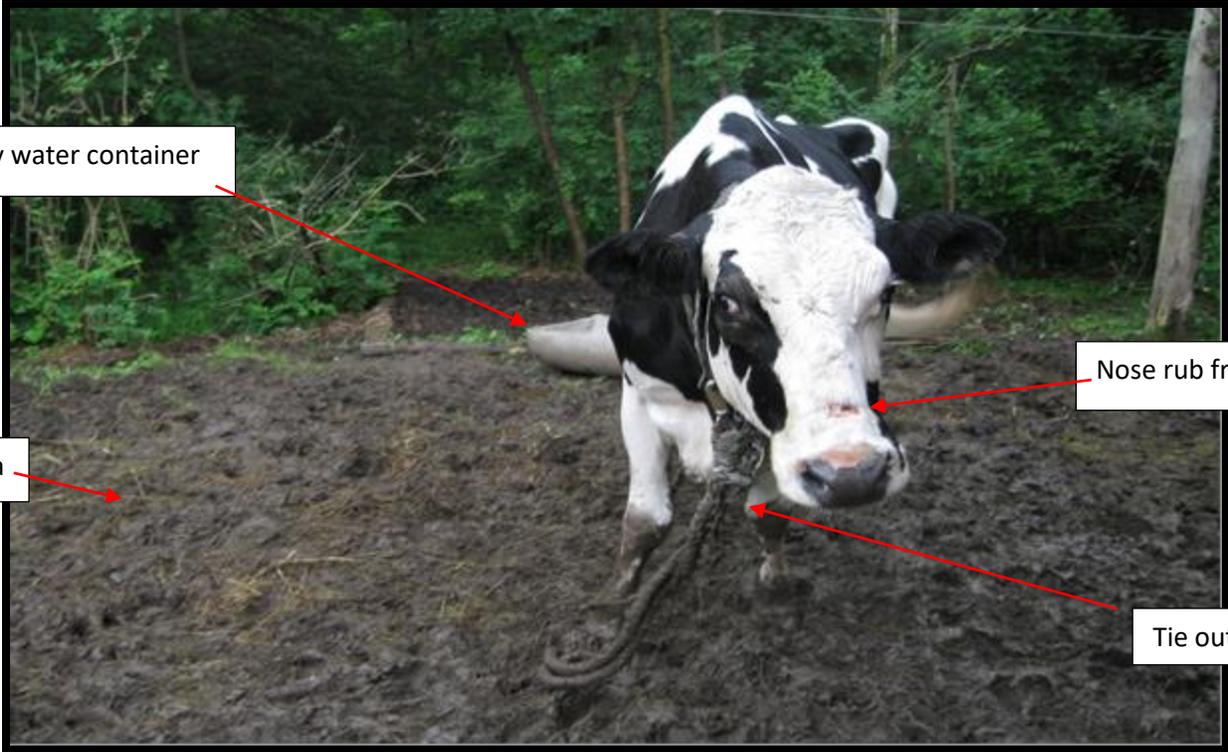
Empty water container empty.

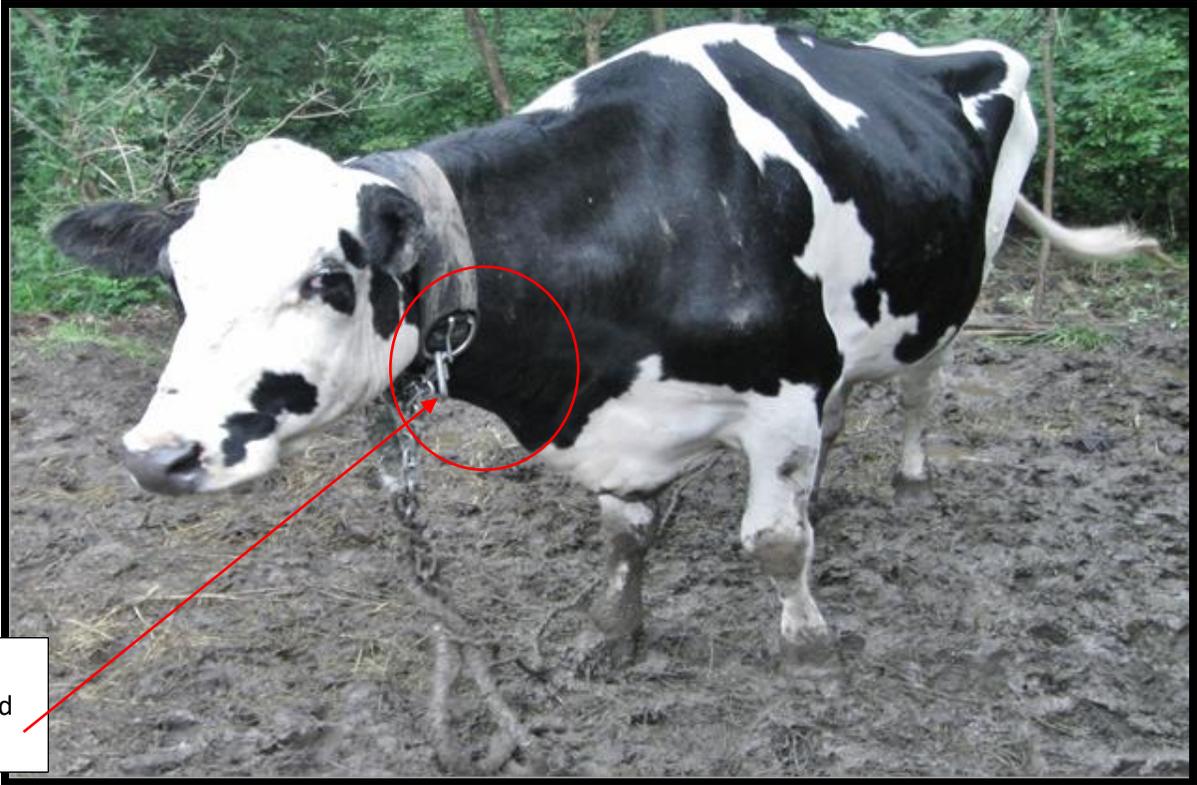
Muddy Area



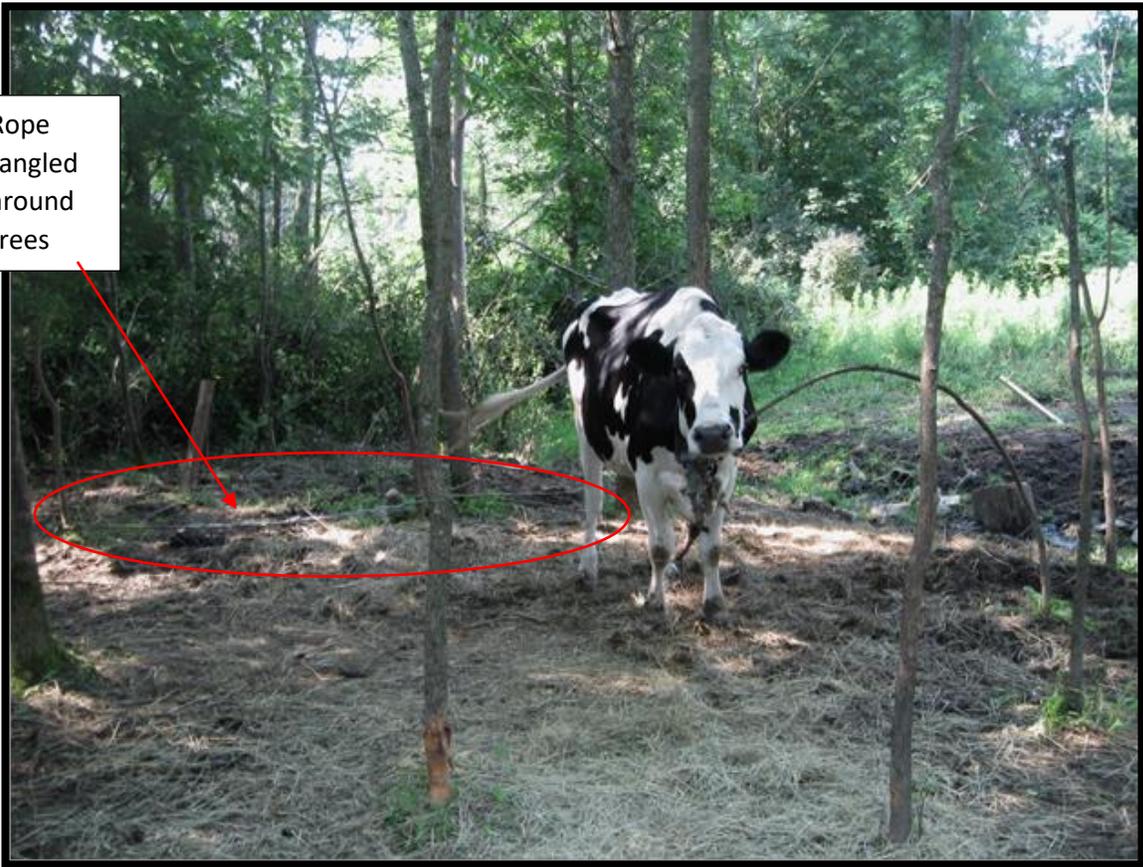
Chained to tree

COW #2





Chain  
around  
neck



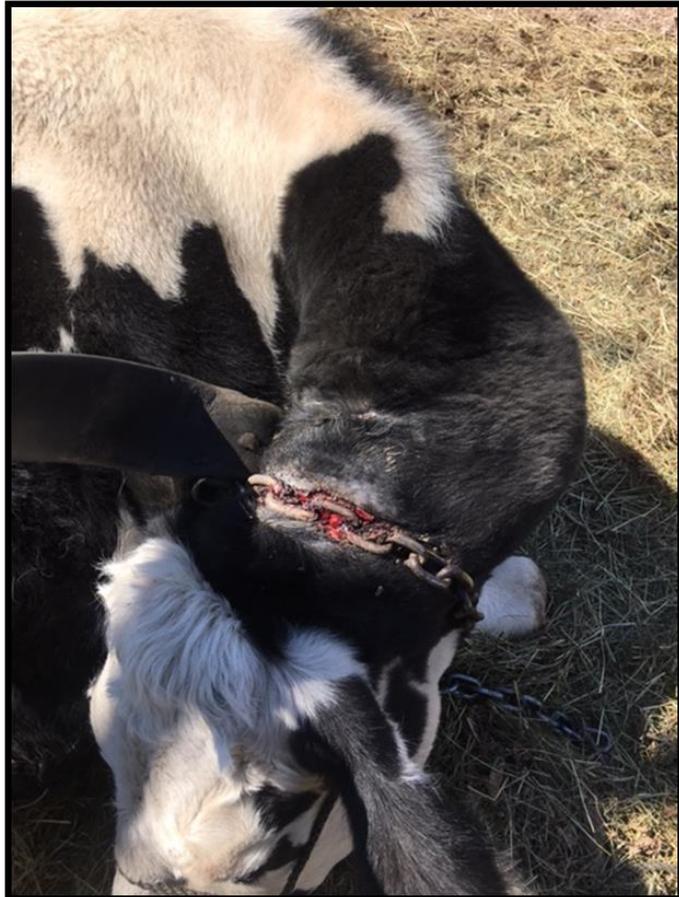
Rope  
tangled  
around  
trees

## Bull



The following photos are the end result of this investigation.  
The bull and cow #2 suffered from embedded collars.

The animals in these photos are alive.



The bull's collar was embedded down to the spine.



When the embedded collars were discovered it was at this time the case rose to the level of criminal charges. In this situation H. 254 section 3 would have prevented unnecessary pain and suffering to the cow and bull.

In the following case example under the current statute Law Enforcement needed to work with this owner trying to obtain voluntary compliance. This case continued for multiple years. There was no natural shelter and pasture conditions were muddy. There were reports of dead calves in the muddy pasture. When the owner was confronted about the concern he stated there were about 20 calves that died due to the muddy conditions.



Muddy pasture

Puddles

Muddy conditions



Cattle wet and covered in mud. Standing in muddy and manure filled water.





*cattle cover in mud*

In conclusion H. 254 would improve the care of livestock in Vermont. H. 254 will help authorities define and identify substandard conditions as early as possible, and be able to address the situation before the animals suffer injury.

As a note, before law enforcement action is taken in any livestock cases the Agency of Agriculture is to be consulted by the Humane Officer.

Thank you,

JoAnn Nichols