

A GUIDE TO HORSE WELFARE AND RESPONSIBLE HORSE OWNERSHIP



HORSE SPORT IRELAND



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INTRODUCTION

Horses and the horse industries have long been important in Ireland. They provide employment and enjoyment to many; and Irish people are rightly acknowledged as world leaders in the production, handling and care of horses. As we have undertaken to domesticate and manage horses for our own ends, we must accept that we have taken on the responsibility of care and maintenance of their welfare. For the purposes of this document, welfare is considered to include both physical health and mental wellbeing. Horses with good welfare are fit and feel good: they then give a high level of performance to us.

Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) is the governing body for all equestrian activities other than Thoroughbred breeding and racing in Ireland. Records show a steady consistent growth in horse production numbers and in sales returns during a ten year period (1998 to 2008). This increased production coupled with current severe economic difficulties has led to an imbalance between supply and demand. The reader is directed to additional material, marked 1, 2 and 3, at the end of this document for detailed information.

Worldwide, there have been advances in standards for issues such as horse identification, equine welfare and owner/keeper responsibilities, in knowledge about disease spread, in training in equine and equitation science, and in concern for drug use in equestrian sport. These must now all receive more detailed consideration in Ireland and this document specifically addresses the issue of horse owners' responsibilities for equine welfare.



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KEY POINTS

- Owners, and others who undertake to keep horses, take upon themselves the responsibility to provide appropriate care for these animals from birth to death.
- Standards of care are based on knowledge of horse needs not on our perception of what is best for them: The Five Freedoms.
- Horses must be accompanied by identification documents when travelling, competing, being traded or disposed of.
- Horse Sport Ireland promotes responsible horse breeding of carefully selected animals for specific markets or purposes: breeding cannot be a fall-back position simply because a horse is not (or no longer) suitable for other purposes.
- The welfare of horses is considered paramount in the production, training and competing of sports horses. Without the horse there is no sport.
- Alternate responsible options include retraining, re-homing, retirement and humane destruction.
- Horses must be disposed of in a humane manner and with appropriate regard for the environment, preferably as close to the point of production as possible.
- Report incidents of cruelty or neglect to the relevant authorities.

OWNING AND KEEPING HORSES RESPONSIBLY

Current best practice is that welfare be based on an appreciation of animals' needs rather than on a human perception of what is best for them. This perception can vary considerably between cultures and this can lead to wide variation in standards of care for equids (horses, ponies, donkeys and mules) worldwide. The Five Freedoms for Animals are the internationally recognised standard describing animals' needs and are adapted here for the domesticated horse (from *The Welfare of Horses*, Waran, 2007).

THE FIVE FREEDOMS

- ONE** Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition: this requires a supply of fresh, clean water and an appropriate diet to maintain health and vigour.
- TWO** Freedom from physical and thermal discomfort: this requires that horses have sufficient bedding and shelter to insulate them against adverse climatic conditions.
- THREE** Freedom from pain, injury and disease: these should be prevented, where preventable, and otherwise there should be rapid diagnosis and treatment of injury, infections, infestations and disease.
- FOUR** Freedom from fear and distress: horses should not be subjected to prolonged periods where they experience significant psychological stress.
- FIVE** Freedom to express most normal patterns of behaviour: horses are sociable animals, they should have the company of other animals, preferably horses, and be kept in situations that foster normal behaviour patterns not vice.





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Horses do not have to be kept stress-free (an impossibility) but subject only to stresses that are not overpowering either in degree or duration. The animals must be able to cope with the environment you keep them in and not suffer long-term loss of health and well-being. Horses must thus be given appropriate food, water and shelter to enable them to maintain physical health; they must not be unnecessarily exposed to injury or disease (or denied treatment should these occur); and should be allowed access to the company of like animals in an environment that does not cause undue distress. Owners/keepers must give attention to horses' basic needs: care of teeth and feet, feeding, shelter, essential vaccinations, companionship, a safe and productive environment, grazing and parasite control, etc. Aim to keep Body Condition Scores (BCS) between 2 and 4 (on a scale of 0 = emaciated to 5 = obese): horses that are significantly under and over-weight suffer from poor welfare.



Body Condition Score 1



Body Condition Score 5

Horses that live apparently pampered lives can suffer poor welfare as well as those seemingly neglected: horses are social creatures not well designed for isolation in a sterile environment.

Detailed advice on good husbandry and management of horses is available from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at:

http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/fawac/publications/Equine_Booklet.pdf and from

Teagasc, a semi-state body providing agricultural advice, at:

http://www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev/docs/programmes/equine/Teagasc_horsecareproof8.pdf



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RESPONSIBLE BREEDING OF HORSES

Breeding horses is not to be undertaken lightly: there are considerable associated costs and the animals produced must be able to do a job (riding, driving, jumping, showing, eventing, etc.) for you the breeder, or have a high likelihood of being attractive to someone else. Responsible breeding requires a positive strategy, well thought through.

Evaluate your breeding mare(s) before deciding to breed; assess the strengths and weaknesses of both mare and marketplace. Be critical in evaluating your mare's own and her relations' physical conformation, temperament and performance records. Assess the current, but more importantly the likely, state of the market when you will have progeny to sell.

If you have determined that breeding your mare is a responsible and viable strategy, pay close attention to stallion selection: there are hundreds available, and foals will receive an equal (but unpredictable) share of genes from both parents. Research the performance records, conformation and temperament of both stallions and relatives (especially offspring). Try to ensure a complementary, not just fashionable, match between sire and dam.

If you have determined that horses in your care are not suitable for breeding, please see the section on responsible alternate options.





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RESPONSIBLE TRAINING AND COMPETING

Horse sports are healthy and most importantly great fun, but there are risks for both horse and human: it is vital that you give great attention to safety when schooling, managing and competing your horses, or when organizing equestrian events for others.





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FEI EQUINE WELFARE CODE

Horse Sport Ireland is recognised by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) which places major emphasis on ensuring the health and welfare of horses at all times. The following is the short version of the FEI equine welfare code:

1. The Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) requires all those involved in international equestrian sport to adhere to the FEI's Code of Conduct and to acknowledge and accept that at all times the welfare of the horse must be paramount and must never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences.
2. At all stages during the preparation and training of competition horses, welfare must take precedence over all other demands. This includes good horse management, training methods, farriery and tack, and transportation.
3. Horses and competitors must be fit, competent and in good health before they are allowed to compete. This encompasses medication use, surgical procedures that threaten welfare or safety, pregnancy in mares and the misuse of aids.
4. Events must not prejudice horse welfare. This involves paying careful attention to the competition areas, ground surfaces, weather conditions, stabling, site safety and fitness of the horse for onward travel after the event.
5. Every effort must be made to ensure that horses receive proper attention after they have competed and that they are treated humanely when their competition careers are over. This covers proper veterinary care, competition injuries, euthanasia and retirement.

The full policy can be seen at:

http://www.fei.org/FEI/FEI_Organisation/Profile/Documents/1995ANNUALREPORTOFTHEBUREAUOFTHEFEI1995.doc

The advent of Equitation Science as a discipline has given the Sport Horse World an improved understanding of how horses learn; the differences between positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment; and what role these can





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properly play in a humane training programme for horses (McGreevy, 2007). Horses learn best, and thus give of their best, with encouragement and reward for correct behaviour/performance (reinforcement), not with punishment. Gadgets are no substitute for good horsemanship.

Horse Sport Ireland has commissioned an expert study, under the chairmanship of Dr G. Holmes, of the current position concerning the use of medication and doping agents in the Irish equestrian sector. HSI holds that the welfare of the horse is paramount and must not be compromised in the pursuit of personal goals. The full details of the findings and recommendations of the Holmes Report can be accessed at http://www.horsesportireland.ie/holmes_report.pdf

RESPONSIBLE ALTERNATE OPTIONS FOR HORSE OWNERS/KEEPERS

Owners/keepers must continue to provide for horses which no longer fulfil the function for which they were originally bred, purchased or kept, or choose a responsible alternate option which makes provision for good horse health and welfare.

1. Retraining and re-homing: the priority should be, where possible, to keep horses in appropriate use. Horses, like people, are best kept in active employment. Horses that are valuable to someone are more likely to be valued i.e. looked after. Appropriate use might include riding, driving, showing, or as a companion for other animals (e.g. when weaning foals). It's healthier for horses to have a job to do; and it gives an owner/keeper an additional incentive to provide good care. Detailed advice is available from The Irish Horse Welfare Trust at <http://www.ihwt.ie>.





2. Retirement: this is an active not a passive state. Retired horses need as much care as those in active use; older horses often require more care than younger horses. This means that attention must be paid to feeding, teeth and feet, worming, vaccination, etc.
3. Euthanasia, humane destruction and horse slaughter.
 - a. Euthanasia means 'a kind death': properly speaking this is carried out as the most humane course of action when an animal is suffering unremitting, irresolvable pain, injury or distress. It must be carried out humanely either by lethal injection of anaesthetic or by use of a free bullet weapon.
 - b. Humane destruction is chosen by an owner who cannot continue to give responsible care to a horse and is faced with no reasonable alternative. Retraining, rehabilitation, re-homing and retirement should first be explored.
 - c. Horse slaughter is a legitimate option for disposal of certain horses. It should be carried out as close to the point of horse production as possible. Licensed factories are inspected and controlled by DAFF in the R.O.I. and DARD in Northern Ireland: slaughter is carried out in a supervised humane fashion. The factory will only wish to purchase certain types of horses; the transaction is conducted on a commercial basis; and the animal must be accompanied by a valid passport that permits entry to the food chain. Sale to dealers who claim that they are gathering horses for transport to slaughter (and may not need any paperwork) is not a responsible option: these horses may face long journeys in poor conditions to factories where welfare may not be adequately protected, or be 'recycled' for leisure or competition purposes.

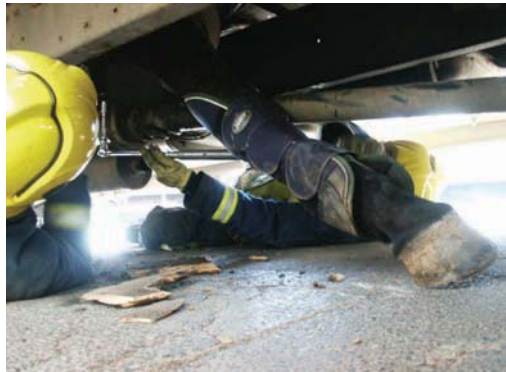


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LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Owners are legally bound to address certain aspects of horse ownership and care. The following areas are governed by specific national and/or European legislation.

- Identification of horses: national legislation requires that horses cannot be bought, sold, competed or moved on the public road without appropriate identification documents {DAFF, 2007a}. European legislation will make it a requirement that ALL equidae are identified by document from 1st July 2009; and all documents issued after this date must include details of a permanent, tamperproof form of identification (i.e. microchip).
- Passports in the R.O.I. can be obtained by application to the relevant licensed Passport Issuing Organisation:
 - Horse Sport Ireland (including the Irish Draught Horse Studbook)
 - Irish Miniature Studbook
 - The Connemara Breed Society
 - The Irish Cob Society Ltd
 - The Irish Horse Passport Agency
 - The Irish Pony Society Company Ltd
 - The Kerry Bog Pony Co-operative Society Ireland
 - Warmblood Studbook of Ireland
 - Weatherbys Ireland Ltd
- Welfare of horses during transport: horses that are being transported, especially over long distances, can suffer from injury, overcrowding, trauma, lack of rest, lack of food and water, and increased susceptibility to disease. Transport of horses is regulated both nationally {DAFF, 2007b} and by the EU (EC 1/2005).





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Commercial transport, transport of horses over 65km and overseas transport of horses are especially subject to regulation including inspection of vehicles and licensing of drivers. There are exemptions in the regulations for persons transporting horses over short distances, over longer distances when accompanied by an attendant, in association with a hobby rather than a professional activity, and on veterinary advice. Further information is available from RACE, Kildare who conduct training courses for driver/vehicle licensing.

- There is generally free movement of horses for production and breeding within the Tripartite Agreement countries (Ireland, The UK and France). Health certificates are required for horses travelling outside these three countries (and between them if intended for slaughter) for reasons of control of infectious disease. Additional restrictions on movement can be imposed in the event of a significant outbreak of contagious disease in the horse population.
- Welfare of horses on farms: where horses are considered to be a farmed species (but not while engaged in a traditional or sporting practice) their welfare is governed by The Welfare of Farm Animals Regulations (DAFF, 2008).
- The Protection of Animals' Act 1911 still applies in cases where the welfare of horses is considered to have been compromised by act or omission.
- An Animal Health and Welfare Bill is currently under consideration and is intended to replace and update the provisions of much of existing legislation in this area.
- Disposal of carcasses: animals and animal byproducts may be disposed of by burial only on the granting of a licence (DAFF 2006). Only horses with valid identification documents not stamped as 'excluded from the food-chain' may be slaughtered for human consumption at approved horse slaughter plants. Licensed Category 2 plants (knackereries) exist to dispose of horse carcasses.



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REPORTING OF EQUINE NEGLECT OR CRUELTY

Various avenues are available to report incidents of equine cruelty. These include:

- DAFF District Veterinary Office in your area www.gov.ie/daff
- Local Authority Veterinary Officer in your area www.environ.ie/en/LocalGovernment/LocalGovernmentAdministration/LocalAuthorities/
- DAFF Animal Welfare Unit, Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2 tel. 01 607 2000 www.agriculture.gov.ie
- The Irish Horse Welfare Trust www.ihwt.ie
- ISPCA National Animal Cruelty Helpline 1890 515 515 www.ispca.ie
- Local SPCA in your area www.ispca.ie/spca-near-you.aspx
- An Garda Síochána in your area www.garda.ie

CONCLUSION

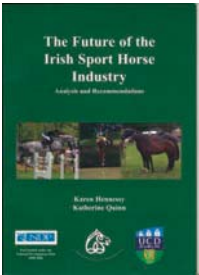
Irish people are proud of our heritage with respect to the quality of our horsemanship and our relationship with our horses. Ensuring good welfare standards for our horses is imperative to maintaining the quality of this tradition into the future, particularly in challenging economic times.



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FURTHER READING

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2. K. Hennessy and K. Quinn, 2007. The Future of the Irish Sport Horse Industry. A UCD report commissioned by the Irish Horse Board. http://www.irishsporthorse.com/_fileupload/publications/strategic.pdf

3. J. A. Collins, A. Hanlon, S. J. More and V. Duggan, 2008. The structure and regulation of the Irish equine industries: Links to considerations of equine welfare. Irish Veterinary Journal 61:746-756. http://www.irishveterinaryjournal.com/Links/PDFs/Peer/Peer_November_2008.pdf

4. FAWAC, 2004. Animal Welfare Guidelines for Horses, Donkeys and Ponies. http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/fawac/publications/Equine_Booklet.pdf
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6. N. K. Waran, (ed) 2007. The Welfare of Horses. Published by Springer.
7. FEI Code of Practice for Ensuring the Welfare of Horses. http://www.fei.org/FEI/FEI_Organisation/Profile/Pages/Code_of_Conduct.aspx
8. Horse Sport Ireland: Report of the Expert Group on the eradication of prohibited substances and practices from the Irish equestrian sector. http://www.horsesportireland.ie/holmes_report.pdf
9. P.D. McGreevy, 2007. The Advent of Equitation Science. The Veterinary Journal Volume 174, Issue 3, pages 492-500. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/B6WXN-4MHPC1Y-1/2/57b825d83f72ba83be12e5ee3740bbe5>
10. A list of Category 2 plants (knackeries) can be found at www.agriculture.gov.ie/schemes/fallenanimalscheme.doc
11. RACE, Kildare. Equine Transport Licence. <http://www.racingacademy.ie/content.asp?id=73>

LEGISLATION

- Commission Regulation (EC 504/2008) as regards methods for the identification of equidae.
- DAFF 2006. Statutory Instrument No. 612 of 2006 European Communities (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies and Animal By-products) Regulations.
- DAFF 2007a. European Communities (Equine Stud-book and Competition) (Amendment) Regulations 2007.
- DAFF 2007b. Guidelines on the protection of animals during transport and related operations concerning the transport of horses.
- DAFF 2008. European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations 2008.

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