



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

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Western Australia.*

Standards and Guidelines for the Health and Welfare of Horses in Western Australia

Consultation draft – October 2022

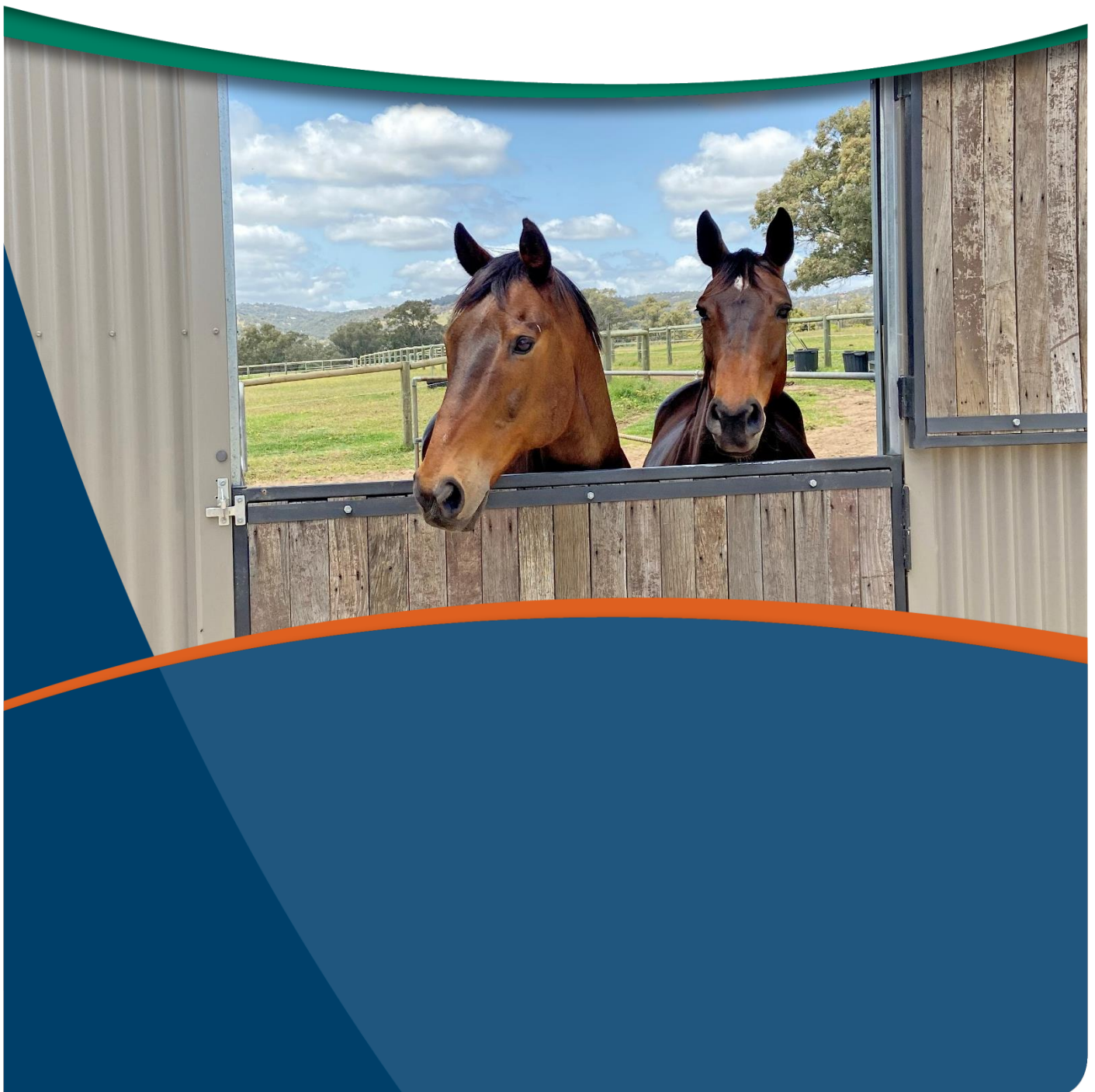


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Preface

The Western Australian Government recognises the importance of animal welfare to our community and strives to ensure that all animals receive an appropriate standard of care. As companions and working or performance animals, horses have an important place in the lives of many Western Australians.

The Horse Standards and Guidelines were prepared by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) in consultation with experts in horse management, welfare and veterinary science. The contents do not necessarily reflect the policies of the organisations or the views of the individuals who participated in the process.

CONSULTATION DRAFT

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Important disclaimer

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.

Part 1 – Preliminary

Section 1 – Introduction

Purpose

This document describes the minimum standards that horse owners and other people are to follow to ensure the health and welfare of horses that are owned and kept in Western Australia (WA). In addition to matters that are the subject of standards, the document sets out guidelines and additional information, which will help people to maximise the health and welfare of horses under their care.

Background

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH – formerly the OIE), animal welfare is ‘the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies’.

For the purpose of this document, health includes both physical and mental health. Good animal welfare requires meeting the various needs of an animal through the five domains: behaviour, nutrition, health, environment and mental state. This includes considering the animal’s mental, social, behavioural and physical needs.

Animal welfare standards and guidelines aim to ensure the humane care and management of all animals in accordance with generally accepted standards. This reflects community expectations that people who are responsible for animals will ensure they are treated humanely.

Appropriate care for animals includes, but is not limited to, the provision of:

- proper and sufficient food and water
- suitable living conditions, including appropriate shelter
- prompt treatment of illness or injury
- routine preventative health care and appropriate husbandry
- the opportunity to express normal behaviour, including appropriate socialisation
- appropriate handling and transport and
- a humane end to life.

Animal welfare legislation in Western Australia

The *Animal Welfare Act 2002* (Animal Welfare Act) and its accompanying regulations provide the legal framework for ensuring that all animals in WA have appropriate standards of care. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) assists the Minister for Agriculture and Food in administering the Animal Welfare Act.

In addition, codes of practice adopted by the Animal Welfare (General) Regulations 2003 provide useful guidance about the management and care of animals. In respect of horses, there are codes of practice that cover the welfare of horses at rodeos, saleyards and depots, during transport, for racing and as feral animals.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding, the enforcement of provisions concerning cruelty to animals in the Animal Welfare Act is primarily conducted by general inspectors from DPIRD and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals WA (RSPCA). More information on animal welfare in WA is available at <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare>.

Scope and application

This document covers key aspects of the care, welfare and health of owned horses kept temporarily or permanently in WA.

The Horse Standards and Guidelines apply to all people with responsibility for the care and management of horses, in both private and commercial settings. They apply to all horses (*Equus caballus*) kept in WA; they do not cover wild, feral or free-ranging horses (i.e. those that do not have an owner or carer).

Standards are the minimum requirements to meet the basic welfare needs of horses. They are presented inside a text box labelled 'Minimum standards', and use the word 'must'.

Guidelines are recommended practices to achieve desirable animal welfare outcomes and use the word 'should'. Guidelines complement the standards and aim to encourage improved animal welfare outcomes.

The Horse Standards and Guidelines are based on currently available scientific evidence and consideration of existing policy in other jurisdictions. Where scientific evidence is lacking, recommendations are based on generally accepted knowledge of the welfare needs of horses. The general information in this document is not a substitute for expert advice on concerns or issues with an individual animal.

The Horse Standards and Guidelines is a DPIRD policy document. If it is decided to introduce new Animal Welfare (Horse) Regulations, compliance with **standards** will become mandatory and there may be penalties for non-compliance. The **guidelines** will not be considered as mandatory requirements. Rather, they are recommended to support the health and welfare of horses.

Part 2 of the Horse Standards and Guidelines applies to all owned horses in private and commercial settings. Part 3 sets out additional requirements that only apply to certain businesses and events that use horses.

Person responsible for a horse

The standards are directed to a 'person responsible for a horse'. This term, as defined below, includes the owner of the horse, a person who has control of the horse, and the owner of the place where the horse is at a relevant time. There may be more than one person responsible for a horse at any one time. For example, the owner and a person who has actual physical custody or control of a horse (such as a trainer or agistment owner) can both be considered as the person responsible for the horse.

Elements of responsibility for each person in charge of horse welfare should include:

- obtaining knowledge of, and understanding, relevant animal welfare laws and policies
- understanding horse behaviour, including handling techniques that minimise stress
- identifying and providing appropriate housing conditions
- identifying and providing appropriate husbandry practices and
- identifying signs of ill health and abnormality and providing appropriate treatment.

Interpretation

In the Horse Standards and Guidelines –

aged horse means a horse over 16 years of age;

appropriate pain relief means the administration of drugs that reduce the intensity and duration of a pain response that is appropriate to the procedure and class of animal;

assisted reproductive procedure means ova or embryo transplants, artificial insemination by surgical method, uterine swabbing, examination for pregnancy by rectal palpation or rectal probe, ovarian examination per rectum, and insertion of an intravaginal catheter;

authorised person means a person who is authorised under the *Veterinary Practice Act 2021* to perform specified acts of veterinary medicine;

bit, in relation to a horse, means a piece of equipment that is placed into the horse's mouth attached to a bridle;

blistering means the application or injection of an irritating substance, such as cantharides, onto or into soft tissue to create an inflammatory reaction;

brand, in relation to a horse, means the permanent identification of a horse by the application of a hot or cold iron directly to its skin;

conditions likely to cause heat stress means environmental conditions where the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) index exceeds 30°C;

competent, in relation to a person, means a person who has the knowledge, skills and experience to carry out the task using the method by which the task is to be carried out;

competitive event means an event where riders or handlers compete for prizes;

crush, in relation to a horse, means a strong stall or cage built specifically for the purpose of restraining a horse for a procedure;

equine dental procedure has the meaning given in the [Equine Dentistry Guidelines](#) produced by the Veterinary Practice Board of WA, as described by categories 1 to 3, as amended from time to time;

establishment includes a horse hire establishment and riding school;

event means any situation where horses congregate to compete for prizes or for training, including pony club, dressage competitions, campdrafts, endurance rides, race meets and horsemanship clinics;

firebrand means branding using a hot iron;

firing means the application of a hot iron, onto or into soft tissue to create an inflammatory response;

foal means an unweaned horse under six months old;

free exercise means movement by free choice uninhibited by any restraints in an area large enough for the horse to move at walk and trot, not less than 200 square metres in size;

halter-trained, in relation to a horse, means the horse is accustomed to wearing a halter on its head and moves away from light pressure applied to the halter in any direction with its head and movement of its feet;

harness horse means a horse pulling a horse-drawn vehicle;

heat stress means when the response by animals to hot conditions above their thermo-neutral limit exceeds the ability of their behavioural, physiological and psychological coping mechanisms;

heritable disorder, in relation to a horse, means a health condition of the horse that is heritable and, if inherited by the progeny of the horse, may adversely affect the progeny's welfare;

horse means an animal of the species *Equus caballus*;

horse-drawn vehicle means any vehicle that is attached to the harness of a horse and includes carts, buggies, carriages, wagons, ploughs and other traditional farming equipment;

horse hire establishment means an establishment where horses are kept for use by customers for leisure riding, upon payment of a fee;

lift, in relation to a horse, means to raise the entire weight of the horse off the ground;

management procedure means routine procedures administered by a horse owner or equine professional, such as administering oral worming paste to a horse, trimming a horse's feet, or Category 1 equine dental procedures;

mare means a female horse that has reached sexual maturity;

method of humane destruction means a method that causes rapid unconsciousness and then the horse's death while it is unconscious;

minor, in relation to a person, means a person under the age of 18;

nicking means the deliberate severing of any tendon or muscle in the tail to cause elevated tail carriage;

noseband means a part of the horse's bridle that encircles the nose and jaw of the horse;

paddock means an enclosure where horses are kept for grazing and free exercise;

performance enhancing substances means substances that are used solely for the purpose of enhancing the performance of a horse (i.e. not for therapeutic purposes);

person responsible, in relation to a horse, includes (a) the owner of the horse; (b) a person who has actual physical custody or control of the horse; (c) if the person referred to in paragraph (b) is a member of staff of another person, that other person; and (d) the owner or occupier of the place or vehicle where the horse is or was at the relevant time;

pharmaceutical agent means any diagnostic or therapeutic drug or combination of drugs that assists in the diagnosis, prevention, treatment of injury or diseases, but does not include nutraceuticals;

physiological requirements means requirements to maintain normal functioning of a horse's body, having regard to the horse's age, reproductive status, environment and circumstances;

poll, in relation to a horse, means the occipital protrusion at the back of the skull, the point immediately behind or right in between the ears;

restraint, in relation to a horse, means any physical method or device used to control a horse, including a halter, twitch or crush;

riding school means an establishment where horses are kept for the purpose of horse riding instruction, where the operator charges a fee;

risk to the welfare of a horse means the potential for the welfare of a horse to be affected in a way that causes pain, injury or distress to the horse;

shelter means any natural landscape feature or manmade structure that affords the horse protection from the elements;

soring means deliberately inflicting pain to a horse to force the horse to perform an exaggerated gait;

stable, also called loosebox, means a small enclosure generally contained in a building or covered by a roof, large enough for the horse to turn around, lie down and stretch, but not large enough to allow free exercise;

stallion means an uncastrated male horse that has reached sexual maturity;

stereotypic behaviour, often termed a 'vice', means abnormal behaviour patterns serving no apparent function, that are performed in a repetitive manner;

supplementary feed means the supply of feed to a horse other than grazing, usually in the form of hay or concentrated feed;

tail docking means the removal of a portion of a horse's dock (section of the tail that contains bone);

tethering means securing a horse to an anchor point to confine it to a desired area, and does not apply to short-term tying up with a lead rope;

treatment procedure means procedures that are not routine management procedures and that may or may not require a veterinarian, such as administering injections;

twitch means a method of restraining a horse by applying pressure by pinching the skin, usually the upper lip, neck, or ear;

veterinarian means a veterinarian registered under the *Veterinary Practice Act 2021*;

veterinary advice means advice of a veterinarian, including telephone advice;

waterlogged means ground that is saturated with water to the extent that free-standing water on the surface, other than immediate rainfall, will not drain away;

whip includes crops and training sticks;

yard means an enclosure used to house horses, large enough to allow horses to turn around, lie down, roll and stretch, but not large enough to allow free exercise; may be attached to a stable, and may be covered by a roof.

Part 2 – General care of horses

Section 1 – General

1. Identification

Objective

To ensure horses are identified in an appropriate way that complies with regulatory requirements and supports their health and welfare.

Minimum standards: Identification

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| S1.1 | A person must not use corrosive chemicals on a horse for the purpose of identification. |
| S1.2 | A person must not place a brand on the head of a horse. |
| S1.3 | A person must not firebrand a horse without appropriate pain relief. |
| S1.4 | A person must only brand a horse if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) they are competent in the method of branding being used, or under the supervision of a competent person; and (b) the method does not pose a risk to the welfare of the horse. |

Recommended guidelines

- G1.1** A person responsible for a horse should ensure the horse is permanently identified at as young an age as practicable.

Note

Identification of horses (with a registered brand or approved identifier) is a regulatory requirement in WA, under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management (Identification and Movement of Stock and Apiaries) Regulations 2013. Horse owners should make sure they are aware of regulatory requirements, which vary by region.

Methods of identification, such as branding and microchipping, can present health and welfare risks to a horse if not performed in an appropriate manner. Microchipping is increasingly being used for identification purposes. Microchips must be implanted in accordance with the requirements in the *Veterinary Practice Act 2021*. Where horses are microchipped, horse owners should regularly check that their contact details are correctly recorded with relevant registries.

If a horse is to be branded, freeze-branding is preferred for animal welfare reasons.

Additionally, all horse owners must be registered as owners of livestock and have a property identification code (PIC) for the property or properties on which their horses are kept. A PIC can be obtained from DPIRD.

Where horses are kept at unoccupied premises, the contact details of the person responsible for the horse should be clearly displayed or readily accessible.

2. Supervision

Objective

To ensure horses are supervised, in accordance with requirements to protect and promote their health, safety and welfare.

Minimum standards: Supervision

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| S2.1 | A person responsible for a horse must ensure the horse is inspected at intervals appropriate to the housing system and risk to the welfare of the horse. |
| S2.2 | A person responsible for a horse confined in a stable or yard must ensure the horse is inspected at least once daily to check for signs of good health and welfare. |
| S2.3 | A person responsible for a horse that is left unsupervised while wearing equipment (such as rugs, hoods, halters and fly veils) must ensure the horse is inspected at least once daily to check the equipment is correctly in place and is appropriate for the circumstances. |
| S2.4 | The parent or guardian of a minor must ensure any horse owned or supervised by the minor is adequately supervised and cared for. |

Recommended guidelines

- G2.1** A person supervising a horse should be capable of recognising signs of abnormality and have access to veterinary advice in a timely manner.
- G2.2** Where possible, all horses should be inspected daily to monitor their health and welfare.
- G2.3** Aged horses, mares in the last month of pregnancy and horses suffering from injury or disease may require inspection more frequently than once daily.

Note

Horses are prone to injury and their health and welfare should be checked regularly. The frequency and thoroughness of supervision should be related to the potential risk to the horse's welfare. By providing regular inspection, potential problems are picked up and dealt with promptly.

Where possible, all horses should be inspected daily. Some horses may need to be inspected more frequently than once a day depending on their physiological requirements.

In situations where horses cannot be checked daily, such as horses kept on extensive pastoral stations, steps should be taken to ensure adequate feed and water is freely available and to mitigate any health and welfare risks, for example in relation to fencing and natural hazards.

Information on health and veterinary care can be found in Chapter 6. Information on rugging can be found in Chapter 12.

3. Natural disasters and emergencies

Objective

To ensure the health, safety and welfare of horses in natural disasters and emergencies is considered and protected.

Minimum standards: Natural disasters and emergencies

- S3.2** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the horse is attended to as soon as reasonably practicable after a natural disaster or other emergency in which the horse is affected.
- S3.3** A person must never pull a horse by the tail by attaching the tail to a vehicle or other device that will pose a risk to the welfare of the horse.
- S3.4** A person must not lift a horse by one or more of the following:
- (a) its head;
 - (b) its neck;
 - (c) its tail; or
 - (d) its legs, unless the horse is anaesthetised and lifted by all four legs with equipment specially designed for lifting horses in such a manner.

Recommended guidelines

- G3.1** Owners of properties at which horses are kept should put in place an emergency plan that includes plans for the management of all horses on the property in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency.

Note

Natural disasters

WA experiences a wide range of emergency threats including fire, extreme weather (cyclones) and floods, which may endanger the welfare of horses. It is the responsibility of owners and carers of horses to properly plan for emergencies in order to keep them safe. Every property where horses are kept should have an emergency plan in place in the event of an emergency such as a bushfire or flood.

Cutting fences or leaving external property gates open during a fire can pose a safety risk to horses as well as people evacuating and emergency responders. More information about preparing for natural disasters can be found on DPIRD's website.

Other emergencies

Horses may become involved in other emergencies such as being trapped inside a vehicle after an accident, trapped in dams or mud, or caught on a gate. Horses can become dangerous to themselves and rescuers when they are distressed, injured or feel trapped.

Emergency rescue

In the event of an emergency rescue, it is preferable that people who are specially trained in large animal rescue skills are consulted or called to attend. Often, a veterinarian will be required to sedate the horse before the rescue is attempted. As an incorrect rescue attempt may result in injury to the horse and/or handler, it is better to assess the situation, prepare appropriately, and wait for assistance before attempting a serious rescue.

Any horse suffering injuries after a natural disaster or other emergency must be provided with appropriate treatment (see Chapter 6), or euthanased without delay (see Chapter 16).

Section 2 – Conditions in which horses are kept and transported

4. Housing conditions

Objective

To ensure the housing and environment of horses are of a standard that promotes and protects their welfare, safety and health.

Minimum standards: Housing conditions

- S4.1** A person responsible for a horse must take reasonable steps to ensure that an area in which the horse is kept:
- minimises the risk of injury and disease to the horse;
 - provides access to ground that is not waterlogged, sufficient for each horse to access at the same time;
 - provides shade, shelter and other reasonable protection from the elements;
 - allows access to a surface suitable for the horse to rest comfortably; and
 - prevents, as much as is reasonably possible, the escape of any horse on the premises.
- S4.2** A person responsible for a horse must ensure that stables or yards in which the horse is usually kept provide sufficient room to allow the horse to stand, walk forward and turn around, lie down with all limbs extended, roll, stretch and groom themselves without restrictions.
- S4.3** A person responsible for a horse must ensure that stables or yards in which the horse is usually kept have sufficient air flow and quality to ensure levels of noxious gases, dust or heat do not pose a risk to the welfare of the horse.
- S4.4** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the conditions in which the horse is kept do not cause overcrowding.
- S4.5** If a horse is confined in a stable or a yard for more than 12 hours in a continuous 24-hour period, a person responsible for the horse must ensure the horse is provided with appropriate bedding.

Recommended guidelines

- G4.1** Where horses are housed alone, they should be kept in a manner that allows them to have regular visual contact with other horses.
- G4.2** The environment in which a horse is kept should be maintained free of sources of toxic substances, including plants, and rubbish that may injure horses.
- G4.3** For properties that are prone to flooding, a contingency plan should be in place to move the horse to firm or dry ground when flooding occurs.

Stables and indoor housing

- G4.4** When horses are kept in stables, the stables should be:
- cleaned regularly (usually daily) to remove urine and faeces; and
 - provided with sufficient bedding of a type that offers physical comfort for the horse, absorbs urine, and minimises the risk of slipping.
- G4.5** Stables that house horses should be designed, constructed and maintained in a manner that:

- (a) provides adequate lighting that enables inspection of the horse;
- (b) provides adequate natural ventilation;
- (c) provides adequate drainage, in a manner that prevents slipping; and
- (d) withstands damage if kicked by the horse.

G4.6 The minimum ceiling height of a building where a horse is usually kept should be sufficient to avoid the horse coming into contact with the ceiling when the horse is standing with its head and neck extended.

G4.7 The duration and intensity of artificial lighting, where used, should be as close as possible to natural conditions.

Fencing and gates

G4.8 Fences should be properly maintained to avoid the escape of a horse.

G4.9 Where horses are not familiar with fences, wire fencing should not be used until the horse has adapted to confinement.

G4.10 A horse should be introduced to unfamiliar fenced areas during daylight hours to reduce the risk of injury.

G4.11 Fences used to confine a horse should be easily visible to the horse.

G4.12 Fencing and gates should be smooth without sharp edges or any protrusions on which the horse could be injured.

G4.13 Temporary electric fences used for strip grazing or pasture rotation should not be used as a property boundary fence for a horse.

G4.14 Gates and doorways should be a minimum of 1.2 metres wide, and wide enough to allow movement by the horse and handler without risk of injury.

G4.15 Gates and doors should be able to be closed securely in a way that cannot be opened by the horse.

Note

Appendix 1 provides further information on the conditions under which horses are kept, including consideration of the behavioural and social needs of horses.

Dimensions and stocking density

Stables and yards should have a minimum floor area of 12 square metres for the average 500-kilogram horse. Wherever possible, larger sizes are preferable and reduce the risk of a horse being cast (where the horse has positioned itself after rolling so close to a stable wall or fence that it can neither get up nor reposition itself to roll the other way).

Appropriate stocking density depends on several factors such as land type and productivity, pasture improvements, stabling and yarding facilities, fencing, and food availability.

Fencing

Fences should be strong enough, of sufficient height and well maintained to prevent horses from escaping. The suitability of fencing varies according to the size, sex and disposition of the horses, stocking density and paddock size. The recommended height for fences for the average size horse is 1.25 metres. Additional height may be necessary for large horses, stallions and horses known to jump fences.

Fencing and gates commonly cause injuries in horses, particularly when fencing is poorly placed, haphazard, unsafe or poorly maintained. Fencing injuries occur more frequently where horses are overcrowded and facilities are inadequate or in a state of disrepair, for example where wire is loose, or when horses are kept in incompatible groups.

Fencing materials most suitable for horses include wood, PVC, metal pipe, mesh (with the diameter of holes smaller than a horse's foot) and electric. Barbed wire, ring-lock, and high tensile wire fencing can cause severe injuries and should be avoided when possible, especially where horses are confined in small areas or kept in adjacent paddocks or areas.

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5. Transport

Objective

To ensure that horses are fit and adequately prepared for the intended journey, and transported in a manner that minimises risks to their welfare, safety and health.

Minimum standards: Transport

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| S5.1 | A person transporting a horse must transport the horse in accordance with the adopted code of practice: the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Land Transport of Livestock. |
|-------------|---|

Note

Transport can be a stressful event for horses. A person responsible for horses must ensure stress and welfare risks associated with transport are minimised.

All vehicles used for transporting horses must comply with the relevant road traffic laws, including but not limited to maximum specified towing limits, towbar and safety chain attachments, appropriate braking systems and maximum speed limits.

Persons transporting horses into WA from another jurisdiction should be aware of the relevant regulatory requirements, and take steps to minimise biosecurity risks.

More information on transporting horses can be found in the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Land Transport of Livestock (Horses).

Section 3 – Health and management

6. Health and veterinary care

Objective

To ensure the provision of appropriate health and veterinary care to protect and promote the health and welfare of horses.

Minimum standards: Health and veterinary care

- S6.1** A person responsible for a horse must take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of pain, injury and distress to the horse from extremes of heat or cold.
- S6.2** A person responsible for a horse showing signs of:
- severe pain or distress;
 - rapidly deteriorating health;
 - serious injury; or
 - severe lameness (as evidenced by a lameness score of 4–5)
- must ensure that veterinary advice is sought, or the horse is humanely destroyed, at the first reasonable opportunity.
- S6.3** A person who seeks veterinary advice under the standards in this document must:
- comply with the advice of the veterinarian; or
 - take an action, equivalent to that advice, that is in the best interest of the welfare of the horse.
- S6.4** A person must not perform a surgical procedure on a horse unless they are a veterinarian or authorised person.
- S6.5** A person must not perform a procedure to alter the normal function of the horse's tail, including tail docking, unless:
- they are a veterinarian; and
 - only for the purpose of curing or alleviating a disease or injury from which the horse suffers.
- S6.6** A person must not perform any of the following procedures on a horse:
- soring;
 - nicking;
 - blistering; or
 - firing.

Note: These provisions have been drafted to comply with the current Veterinary Practice Regulations. Once new Veterinary Practice Regulations have been drafted and are in force, amendments may be made to align the requirements.

Recommended guidelines

Poor health and injury

- G6.1** An aged horse should receive a health-check by a veterinarian or a person experienced in the care of horses for general health as frequently as necessary, with at least one check a year, to enable provision of suitable health care.
- G6.2** Paddocks used for grazing horses should be managed in such a way that contamination by parasites, toxic plants or other agents is minimised.
- G6.3** The application of fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and farm manure should be managed to prevent any health risks to grazing horses.

Preventative health care

- G6.4** Horses should be vaccinated in accordance with veterinary recommendations, based on consideration of the individual horse's circumstances, including age and health state, location and likely contact with other horses and animals. Routine vaccination of horses against tetanus is recommended.
- G6.5** Reasonable measures should be taken to protect horses from internal and external parasites, as recommended by veterinarians or relevant product manufacturers.
- G6.6** A new horse introduced to a property should be isolated from the established group of horses for 7–10 days to reduce the risk of disease introduction.

Management of horses

- G6.7** Management procedures and treatment procedures should:
 - (a) be performed by only competent persons in a manner that considers the safety of the horse and handler; and
 - (b) be administered in a hygienic manner.
- G6.8** Injectable, oral and external medication or supplements should be used only in accordance with the manufacturer's or a veterinarian's instructions.
- G6.9** Horses that have had a surgical procedure, or sedation and/or anaesthesia, should be monitored on recovery, and veterinary advice sought if there are any concerns.
- G6.10** Suitable equipment and facilities should be available when the horse is subjected to any surgical, husbandry or treatment procedure.
- G6.11** Nasogastric tubing should be performed by a veterinarian or under veterinary supervision.

Note

Domestic horses rely on humans to maintain their health and welfare. Owners and carers of horses have a responsibility to maintain the health of a horse in their care, and to seek treatment for injury and disease when it occurs. Owners and carers should be aware of what is normal and be able to detect any changes in relation to the horse's normal state. If a horse's health deteriorates, the cause(s) should be identified and immediate corrective action taken. In many cases, this means involving a veterinarian.

Horses should be checked regularly by a person responsible for the horse to detect changes to normal behaviour or signs of ill health. Seeking veterinary attention early in the course of an illness can minimise the impact and assist the management of the problem. Veterinary advice and instructions on treatment should be followed diligently.

Colic (abdominal pain) is common in horses in WA, with varying causes, treatment and severity. A person responsible for a horse should be able to recognise signs of colic and take reasonable preventative steps.

Lameness is a term used to describe an abnormal stance or gait. Lameness may result from skin wounds, muscle pain, joint inflammation, tendon and ligament injury, bone injury or hoof damage. Information on colic and lameness can be found in Appendix 2.

A person responsible for a horse should be able to recognise signs of illness and injury that require immediate veterinary advice, and have basic knowledge of equine first aid to be able to respond appropriately. A well-equipped and maintained first aid kit for horses should be readily available where horses are kept. More information can be found in Appendix 2, including signs of ill health and considerations for keeping a first aid kit.

In addition to physical health, consideration ought to be given to the horse's mental wellbeing. In the context of mental health, the behavioural and social needs of horses are covered in Chapter 9.

Information on husbandry practices, such as foot care and dental care, can be found in Chapter 10 and 11 respectively. Information on restraint can be found in Chapter 13.

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7. Food and water

Objective

To ensure horses are provided with food and water of sufficient quality and quantity to protect and promote their health, safety and welfare.

Minimum standards: Food and water

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| S7.1 | A person responsible for a horse must ensure the horse is provided with drinking water of a sufficient quantity and quality to maintain good health and meet its physiological requirements. |
| S7.2 | A person responsible for a horse must ensure the horse is provided with food of sufficient quantity and quality to maintain good health and meet its physiological requirements. |
| S7.3 | A person responsible for a horse must not deprive the horse of access to food for more than 24 hours, unless under veterinary advice. |
| S7.4 | A person responsible for a horse must not deliberately withhold water from the horse for a period that poses a risk to the welfare of the horse, unless under veterinary advice. |

Recommended guidelines

- G7.1** A horse should be fed proper and sufficient supplementary food if there is insufficient pasture for the horse to graze, or if the horse is losing body condition.
- G7.2** Where a horse cannot be provided food or water of sufficient quantity and quality to maintain good health and meet physiological requirements, alternative arrangements must be made. This may include moving or selling the horse to where sufficient feed and water are available, or at a last resort, euthanasia.
- G7.3** A horse should be protected from access to food that is harmful to health, such as mouldy hay or silage, lawn mower clippings and poisonous plants.
- G7.4** Changes to the horse's diet should be introduced gradually.
- G7.5** Feeding sites for horses should be spaced to minimise bullying and allow subordinate horses to have sufficient access to feed.
- G7.6** A horse should be provided with a diet high in roughage in the form of pasture, hay or appropriate substitutes to simulate natural foraging behaviour.
- G7.7** Feed should be prepared hygienically and stored to prevent its deterioration or contamination, including mould.
- G7.8** Nosebags and grazing muzzles should be constructed to allow rapid escape of water from the bag. Where made of solid material, horses should not have access to any water source while wearing the nosebag or grazing muzzle.
- G7.9** Nosebags should be left on a horse's head only while a horse is eating.
- G7.10** Food and water containers provided for horses should be:
 - (a) of a design that does not pose an unreasonable risk to the welfare of the horse;
 - (b) safe and free of sharp edges or protrusions;
 - (c) be inspected at least once daily for functionality, cleanliness and freedom from contamination; and
 - (d) readily accessible to the horse and positioned to avoid unintended spillage or contamination.

- G7.11** Regular assessment should be made of the quality and quantity of water supply, including inspection of the mechanical equipment controlling the delivery of water (including windmills, bores and automatic waterers).
- G7.12** Contingency measures should be in place to provide the horse with access to water in case of failure of mechanical water sources.
- G7.13** Where water is supplied without automatic refill, the supply should be inspected and topped up at least every 12 hours to ensure the horse has free access to an adequate supply of good quality water.
- G7.14** If a horse is kept on a property without access to a permanent water supply, there must be adequate storage on site for a minimum of two days' water to satisfy the daily requirements of all horses on the property.
- G7.15** If a horse has access to water in a dam, the dam should:
- (a) provide safe access for the horse;
 - (b) be free from rubbish and contaminants;
 - (c) be regularly inspected to ensure dam levels and water quality are adequate, especially during periods of low rainfall; and
 - (d) if deemed unsafe, be fenced off and an alternative water source provided.

Note

Food and water are important to animal health and welfare. All horses require balanced amounts of protein, energy, vitamins and minerals. As the exact nutritional requirements of a horse depend on the individual animal, a horse's diet must be tailored to its specific needs.

Persons inexperienced in horse care should consult a veterinarian or a qualified and experienced equine nutritionist about selection of suitable foodstuffs for horses used for a particular purpose. Due to their highly specialised digestive system, horses should have continuous access to roughage. Significant restriction of food, for example to achieve weight loss, should be undertaken only under the guidance of a qualified and experienced equine nutritionist or veterinarian. Change in a horse's diet should be made gradually to reduce the chance of digestive upsets such as colic and diarrhoea.

Water can be provided in troughs, buckets or dams. Horses require high volumes of water to maintain a functional digestive system and to effectively cool themselves. The amount of water required on a daily basis varies and is dependent on the horse's body weight, age, pregnancy and/or lactation status, seasonable climatic conditions, exertion, feeding regime and composition of diet and health status. Ideally, horses should have unlimited access to clean water at all times. While there are many factors that influence how long a horse can be without water before experiencing poor welfare, as a general rule, water should not be withheld from horses for longer than six hours.

Sand ingestion is a major contributing factor to colic in horses in WA. Efforts should be made to minimise sand ingestion by the horse by providing hay and hard feed in containers that prevent sand ingestion and by limiting access to grazing on sandy soils when pasture begins to grow. Further information on colic can be found in Appendix 2.

Appendix 3 provides background information on food and water for horses.

8. Body condition

Objective

To ensure that a horse maintains a body condition commensurate with good health and welfare.

Minimum standards: Body condition

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| S8.1 | A person responsible for a horse must take reasonable steps to maintain the horse in a body condition score of not less than 2 and not more than 4. |
| S8.2 | A person responsible for a horse with a body condition score of less than 2 must take reasonable steps to increase the horse's body condition. |
| S8.3 | A person responsible for an aged horse must take reasonable steps to ensure the horse is provided with proper and sufficient nutrition, and dental and veterinary care to prevent excessive weight loss. |

Recommended guidelines

- G8.1** Veterinary advice should be sought for a horse with:
- a body condition score of above 4 or below 2 and showing signs of ill health;
 - a body condition score of below 2 that does not respond to increased nutritional intake;
 - a body condition score of above 4 that does not respond to reduced nutritional intake and suitable increases to the horse's level of exercise; or
 - a body condition score that has changed without known changes to nutritional intake or level of exercise.

Note

A horse's body condition reflects its health and nutritional state and can be assessed through body condition scoring (BCS). In horses, BCS involves observing and feeling fat cover of the six major areas of the horse: neck, withers, shoulder, ribs, loin and pelvis. A common system of condition scoring using a 0 to 5 scale can be found in Appendix 4.

Persons responsible for horses should be able to make a reasonable assessment of a horse's body condition. The weight and body condition of every horse should be monitored regularly to avoid welfare problems. A sudden change in appetite or decrease in weight can be a sign of ill health and should be closely monitored and investigated.

Reasonable steps that may be taken for a horse with a body condition score of less than 2 include seeking advice from a veterinarian or experienced equine nutritionist, reducing the horse's exercise or increasing the horse's nutritional intake.

9. Behavioural needs

Objective

To support a horse's health and welfare by meeting its behavioural and social needs.

Minimum standards: Behavioural needs

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| S9.1 | A person responsible for a horse must ensure the design of facilities, the stocking density and the composition of groups of horses allow each horse to have an area of its own, sufficient for subordinate horses to have an opportunity to escape from dominant animals in the group. |
| S9.2 | A person responsible for a horse displaying stereotypic behaviour must provide the horse with appropriate intervention therapy based on veterinary advice or accepted industry practice. |

Recommended guidelines

- G9.1** Housing systems should provide conditions that encourage the horse's natural behaviours as much as possible. This includes keeping horses in groups wherever possible.
- G9.2** If stallions are not suitable for turnout with other horses, reasonable effort should be made to meet their social needs and/or provide environmental stimulation.
- G9.3** The introduction of a new horse or reintroduction of a segregated horse into a group should be supervised.
- G9.4** Strategies should be in place to prevent stereotypic behaviour, and for horses that display stereotypic behaviour, to reduce their incidence.
- G9.5** Where a horse is displaying stereotypic behaviour, effort should be made to reduce or eliminate the cause of the behaviour as much as possible.

Note

Natural behaviours

Animal welfare, safety and health are supported when the mental, social, behavioural and physical needs of individual horses are satisfied. The expression of natural behaviours is important for the welfare of horses and an inability to express natural behaviours is a common cause of stress.

Horses are herd animals and keeping them in social groups provides them with the opportunity to exhibit natural behaviours such as play, grooming, and other bonding behaviours. If the social group is stable and social bonds between horses are well established, stress can be minimised. Other natural behaviours that should be encouraged include foraging and browsing, sufficient sleep and rest, and rolling.

Where behavioural needs of a horse are not met, the horse may exhibit stereotypies (vices), resistance or lack of cooperation when worked or handled, lethargy or exhaustion.

Stereotypic behaviour

Stereotypic behaviour, or vices, are abnormal behaviours detrimental to a horse's welfare. They include, but are not limited to: weaving, crib-biting, wind-sucking, pawing, kicking, pacing, self-trauma and self-mutilation. Research suggests the most likely cause of stereotypic behaviour in horses is chronic stress resulting from boredom, frustration, confinement, social isolation, limited access to roughage or inadequate exercise.

It is important to recognise that physical prevention of the stereotypic behaviour, such as the use of windsucking collars, does not address the behavioural needs of the horse, and may result in increased stress. As such, by themselves, they are not 'appropriate intervention methods' for the purpose of this document. Instead, all efforts should be made to reduce or eliminate the causes of the behaviour. Providing stimulation through provision of exercise, time out at pasture, a high fibre diet and social interaction can assist in managing stereotypic behaviours.

CONSULTATION DRAFT

10. Foot care

Objective

To ensure that horse's hooves are managed sufficiently to maintain soundness and protect and promote health and welfare.

Minimum standards: Foot care

- S10.1** A person responsible for a horse must take reasonable steps to ensure the horse's hooves are maintained to permit normal mobility and do not pose a risk to the welfare of the horse.
- S10.2** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the horse's hooves are adequately protected or accustomed to the surface on which a horse is exercised or kept.
- S10.3** A person responsible for a horse must seek advice from a veterinarian or farrier if the horse is suffering from overgrown, injured or diseased hooves likely to cause the horse pain.
- S10.4** A person must only shoe or trim a horse's hooves if they are competent to do so, or under supervision of a competent person.
- S10.5** A person must not put hoof boots on a horse unless:
- the hoof boots are designed for use on a horse;
 - the hoof boots are appropriate for the activity;
 - there is no trauma to the skin in contact with the boot; and
 - the horse is inspected at least once per day to ensure there is no trauma to the skin in contact with the boot.

Recommended guidelines

- G10.1** Shoeing or trimming should not cause pain, any abnormality of gait or significant changes to the horse's conformation, unless otherwise advised by a veterinarian.
- G10.2** Hooves of a horse should be inspected regularly for signs of injury, loose shoes or impacted stones. This may require daily inspection.
- G10.3** Loose shoes and those with risen clenches (shoe nails) should be promptly removed, to prevent possible foot injury.
- G10.4** The feet of horses should be inspected at least every six weeks and:
- in the case of shod horses, replacement or adjustment of shoes by competent persons;
 - in the case of unshod horses, trimmed as needed by competent persons.
- G10.5** Hoof boots should be in good repair, fit well and provide sufficient grip to prevent horses from slipping.

Note

Regular hoof care is essential for maintaining horse welfare. Inadequate hoof care can cause pain, lameness, impaired movement, and lead to joint and tendon problems. Hooves should be regularly cleaned and inspected for foreign materials and signs of injury or disease, especially when horses are standing on wet ground which can predispose horses to hoof disease. The frequency of inspection and trimming of hooves depends on the individual horse and the environment in which it is kept, including age, time of year, nutrition and injury.

Information on lameness can be found in Appendix 2.

11. Dental care

Objective

To protect horse welfare and health by the provision of adequate dental care.

Minimum standards: Dental care

- S11.1** A person must not perform equine dental procedures on a horse unless they are:
- competent to perform the procedure; and
 - where required under the *Veterinary Practice Act 2021*, a veterinarian or authorised person.
- S11.2** A person must not perform any equine dental procedure on a horse that causes modification, damage or injury which poses a risk to the welfare of the horse.
- S11.3** Where an equine dental procedure is likely to cause pain, a person responsible for a horse must ensure the provision of appropriate pain relief, which may include anaesthesia and sedation.

Note: These provisions have been drafted to comply with the current Veterinary Practice Regulations. Once new Veterinary Practice Regulations have been drafted and are in force, amendments may be made to align the requirements.

Recommended guidelines

- G11.1** A person responsible for a horse should check the horse's mouth regularly for signs of discomfort and dental problems.
- G11.2** A horse should receive an oral examination by a competent person often enough to minimise risk, and at least once a year.
- G11.3** Any person performing a dental procedure on a horse should have sufficient experience, knowledge and skill to:
- handle the horse in a safe, humane manner;
 - identify relevant anatomy, both normal and abnormal; and
 - recognise and understand complications of the procedure and know when to refer cases to an appropriately qualified person.

Note

Dental injury or disease is painful and can lead to other health and welfare problems, including extreme weight loss. Horses can suffer painful lacerations inside their cheeks if the horse has sharp teeth and pressure is applied with halters, nosebands and bridles (including bitless bridles). Proper routine dental care can prevent many dental problems in horses. Routine dental care may include filing horses' teeth to remove sharp points (floating). Horses displaying oral stereotypies, such as windsucking, are at increased risk of dental damage.

Signs of dental discomfort or problems include dropping feed while eating (quidding), salivation and foul odour. Dental injury/disease may cause behavioural changes, such as head tossing, pulling to one side when ridden, increased resistance to the bridle, being generally unsettled, or unwilling to perform correctly or consistently. Persons responsible for horses should regularly check the horse's mouth for signs of dental problems. An absence of outward signs does not mean the horse does not require regular dental care. The *Veterinary Practice Act 2021* sets legal requirements in relation to dental procedures. It is the responsibility of the person performing the procedure to ensure they are authorised to do so.

12. Rugging

Objective

Horses are appropriately rugged for the conditions, and their health, safety and welfare are not compromised by the rug or the wearing of the rug.

Minimum standards: Rugging

- S12.1** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the rugs used on a horse are suitable for the needs of the horse having regard to its physical condition, environment and circumstances.
- S12.2** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the rugs used on a horse do not cause the horse to sweat excessively or suffer from heat stress.
- S12.3** A person responsible for a horse must ensure that a rug is removed at least once weekly for inspection of the horse's body condition, skin health and any rubbing or injury caused by the rug.

Recommended guidelines

- G12.1** Rugs should be fit for purpose, particularly in extremes of hot, cold or wet weather.
- G12.2** Rugs should be well fitting and in good repair.
- G12.3** During very hot or humid weather horses should not be rugged unless the horse can be maintained in an adequately cool state whilst wearing a rug.
- G12.4** Horses wearing rugs should be checked at reasonable intervals, and no less than once per day, to ensure that rugs are well fitting, not broken or tangled and that the horse is not sweating or wet under the rug.
- G12.5** Where a horse is kept in a bushfire risk area, a horse should not be rugged on days when there is a high bushfire risk.
- G12.6** Rugs that are not waterproof should not be used if rain is likely to occur.
- G12.7** A horse should be given intervals without being rugged to allow natural behaviours such as mutual grooming and rolling unimpeded.
- G12.8** Horses should be familiarised with wearing rugs before being released into a paddock while wearing a rug.

Note

Healthy horses can regulate their body temperature and can tolerate a wide variation of heat and cold if they are acclimatised, are in good body condition and have access to adequate food, water and shelter. Rugging can be a risk to a horse's welfare because, in many cases, it takes away a horse's ability to effectively regulate its own body temperature. If rugs are used, they must be appropriate for the weather conditions. Rugs may need to be changed and removed frequently as the weather changes. Particular care may need to be taken to ensure clipped horses are rugged appropriately for the weather conditions.

Rugging should not be used as a substitute for shade or shelter. Rugging in summer can contribute to heat stress by preventing any breeze from cooling the body. Many synthetic materials contribute further to heat stress and dehydration by trapping heat and causing horses to sweat.

13. Restraint

Objective

To ensure the restraining of a horse is done in a manner that protects its welfare, safety and health.

Minimum standards: Restraint

- S13.1** A person responsible for a horse must ensure restraint methods or equipment used on a horse do not pose a risk to the welfare of the horse.
- S13.2** A person must not apply a twitch to a horse for longer than 15 minutes continuously.
- S13.3** A person must not ear twitch a horse with a rope or other device.
- S13.4** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the horse receives appropriate training to accept restraint methods.
- S13.5** A person responsible for a horse must ensure that a restraint device used on a horse is designed appropriate for the purpose, maintained, well-fitting and used in the manner it was intended to be used.
- S13.6** A person must not restrain a horse in a manner that causes its head to be held above the level of the withers for a period that poses a risk to the welfare of the horse, unless for a veterinary procedure.

Recommended guidelines

- G13.1** When restraining a horse, the least restrictive methods that will achieve the necessary control should always be used.
- G13.2** Harsh restraint devices, such as rearing chains and bull bits, should not be used in place of adequate training.
- G13.3** A horse should be restrained using only safe facilities suitable for horses. For example, horses should not be restrained in a cattle crush, tied to objects that can be moved by the horse, or restrained in horse floats for veterinary procedures.
- G13.4** A horse should be properly halter-trained before being tied-up.
- G13.5** A horse should not be tied-up with reins attached to a bit in the horse's mouth.
- G13.6** Where possible, halters should not be left on unsupervised horses. Where halters are left on unsupervised horses, the halter should open under pressure.

Note

Restraint refers to any physical method used to control a horse, including a halter and lead, a twitch or use of a crush. Using tack, tethers and hobbles are covered in other chapters.

Appropriate forms of restraint will vary with the horse's temperament and level of training, the nature of the procedure and the skill of the handler. Commonly, a halter and lead rope are all the restraint required. Twitching is stressful for the horse, and should be avoided whenever possible. Nose twitches with soft, thick rope and light handles are preferred as they cause less pain and have less chance of causing tissue damage to the horse's lip than twitches with thin or narrow rope or chain. Ear twitching is discouraged as it is inherently painful, whether by hand or with a device, and can cause horses to become head shy.

14. Tethering and hobbling

Objective

To ensure tethering or hobbling, if used, are done in a manner that minimises the risk to the welfare, safety and health of horses.

Minimum standards: Tethering and hobbling

- S14.1** A person responsible for a horse must not tether or hobble the horse in a way that poses a risk to the welfare of the horse. Without limiting the above, this includes tethering or hobbling a horse:
- (a) that is not halter-trained;
 - (b) adjacent to a drop or near an obstacle likely to cause harm;
 - (c) with access to deep water that poses a drowning risk for the horse;
 - (d) outdoors unless provided with such shade, shelter or other protection from the elements as is reasonably necessary to ensure its welfare, safety and health; or
 - (e) on steep terrain, or terrain that is prone to flooding or water logging.
- S14.2** A person must not tether or hobble a horse for a continuous period of more than 12 hours in any 24-hour period.
- S14.3** A person must not tether or hobble a mare:
- (a) that is known to be, or visually assessed to be, more than 40 weeks pregnant; or
 - (b) with a foal at foot.
- S14.4** A person must not tether or hobble a mare that is in season in close proximity to a stallion.
- S14.5** A person must not tether or hobble a horse that has not been appropriately trained by a competent person. A horse must be constantly supervised during training.
- S14.6** A person responsible for a horse must not tether the horse in a manner that:
- (a) could cause it to become tangled with an obstruction or another tethered animal; or
 - (b) allows it to stand within 5 metres of a road.
- S14.7** A person responsible for a horse must ensure a tether used to confine a horse:
- (a) is attached to the neck band or head collar; and
 - (b) contains a point able to be broken by the force of the horse.
- S14.8** A person must not hobble a horse during transport.
- S14.9** A person responsible for a horse must ensure equipment used to hobble a horse:
- (a) does not pose a risk to the welfare of the horse; and
 - (b) is specifically designed for hobbling a horse.

Note: These standards apply to tethering for the purpose of confinement, and do not apply to short-term restraint.

Recommended guidelines

- G14.1** Hobbles should be made of good quality leather.
- G14.2** Hobble training should be done in a safe, confined area.
- G14.3** Hobbles should only be used when a horse is standing on a soft, non-slip surface.
- G14.4** Tethers should only be used when other means of confinement are unsuitable.

- G14.5** The use of a tether to confine a horse should be discontinued if the horse displays signs of distress associated with tethering.
- G14.6** A horse under two years old should not be tethered.
- G14.7** There should be at least 4 metres between the hindquarters of one tethered horse to another at the maximum extent of the tethers.
- G14.8** Horses tethered together on a running tether should be separated by a distance of at least 4 metres.
- G14.9** Where appropriate, horses should be tethered within a property boundary that is adequately fenced should the horse break away from the tether.
- G14.10** A tethered horse should be inspected at least three times a day to assess the health and well-being of the horse.

Note

Persons in charge of tethered or hobbled horses must comply with any other relevant requirements in this document, such as the provisions on food, water and exercise.

Tethering

Tethering should not be confused with short-term tying up with a lead rope or with hobbling. Tethering of horses is inherently dangerous and is not recommended. Tethered horses may be unable to evade predators, obtain shelter, reach water, undertake sufficient exercise or display natural behaviours. They may be exposed to environmental hazards or be isolated from their companions. Tethering should be undertaken with extreme care and supervision, ensuring the horse's welfare is treated as a priority.

Hobbling

Hobbles are used as a restraint device to immobilise a horse by limiting its movement. This chapter does not apply to the use of hobbles (straps connecting front and rear legs on the same side of harness racing horses to help them 'pace' correctly).

Hobbles can be used to teach a horse to stand patiently, which can be particularly useful in the event of entanglement. However, hobbling of horses can expose them to increased welfare risks, and must be undertaken with extreme care by experienced persons only. There are several types of hobbles used for horses and any person using hobbles on horses should be experienced and familiar with the equipment and the manner in which it is used. The hobbles should be used only in the manner they are intended.

15. Breeding

Objective

To ensure breeding practices protect the health and welfare of horses, and prevent inherited disorders and the over-production of horses.

Minimum standards: Breeding

- S15.1** A person who causes a horse to breed must ensure breeding is managed to avoid unnecessary pain, injury or distress.
- S15.2** A person responsible for a horse must ensure facilities used for breeding are constructed and maintained to minimise the risk to welfare of the horse.
- S15.3** A person must not perform assisted reproductive procedures on a horse unless they are a veterinarian or authorised person.
- S15.4** A person responsible for a horse must not breed the horse if the horse is known, or could be reasonably suspected, to have a heritable disorder, unless under the advice of a veterinarian or relevant geneticist.
- S15.5** A person responsible for a horse must not cause the horse to be bred with a:
 - (a) sibling of the horse; or
 - (b) parent or offspring of the horse.

Note: These provisions have been drafted to comply with the current Veterinary Practice Regulations. Once new Veterinary Practice Regulations have been drafted and are in force, amendments may be made to align the requirements.

Recommended guidelines

- G15.1** Indiscriminate breeding, and breeding of horses with a type and temperament unsuitable for specific purposes, should be avoided.
- G15.2** Horses should be allowed to breed only when there is a reasonable expectation of finding suitable homes for any foal produced.
- G15.3** Unless selected for breeding, mares in season should be housed separately from stallions.
- G15.4** A mare in the last month of pregnancy should be provided with a safe and suitable foaling environment.
- G15.5** Mares should be monitored after birth to ensure they pass the placenta within three hours. If the placenta fails to pass, urgent veterinary advice should be sought.
- G15.6** Foals should be monitored for the initial 24 hours after birth to ensure the meconium is expelled, urination and suckling are normal and the foal consumes colostrum.
- G15.7** Foals orphaned at birth, if under human care, should receive colostrum or a substitute within 24 hours of birth. Veterinary advice should be sought to ensure an appropriate health and feeding program is provided for the foal.
- G15.8** Weaning of foals should:
 - (a) not be carried out before six months of age, unless under veterinary advice;
 - (b) be carried out in a safe environment; and
 - (c) be carried out in a manner that minimises stress on the foal and mare, which may require a staged approach and the company of other horses.

Note

Many welfare problems can be prevented through responsible breeding, which includes mare and sire selection, how the horses are bred and the number of horses bred. Responsible breeding is selective and purposeful. The breeding of horses for temperament, conformation and, for specific uses, can help ensure that fewer horses suffer neglect.

Excessive breeding that results in surplus horses to market requirements may contribute to poor welfare and neglect of horses. Following responsible breeding practices, persons breeding horses should ensure there is a market for the foal prior to breeding.

Breeding is not without risk to the health and welfare of the mare. As such, breeders should have a good understanding of the general mental, social, behavioural and physical needs of horses, and any additional issues posed by breeding. Breeding of aged mares is discouraged due to increased incidences of complications. Recognising the increased energy demands associated with breeding, stallions and pregnant/lactating mares should be fed appropriately and closely monitored for loss of condition.

Responsible breeders generally follow a specific breeding program that is purposeful rather than accidental or indiscriminate, and produces quality offspring that have a known market or purpose. The term 'purpose-bred' describes horses bred for a specific industry and involves careful selection of a mare and sire that are proven in their field, and have good conformation and temperament. It is desirable that horses are healthy and free from known hereditary conditions that will impact on the welfare of the offspring.

Care should be taken when housing foals to prevent injury, escape and ingestion of toxic materials. When accompanied by their mothers, foals may be handled to accustom them to being caught and led, to having their legs and feet handled and to being confined within a yard, stable or horse float.

16. Humane destruction

Objective

To ensure horses are afforded a humane death, without pain, suffering or distress.

Minimum standards: Humane destruction

- S16.1** A person who destroys a horse must:
- use a method of humane destruction to destroy the horse; and
 - be a competent person, or acting under the direct supervision of a competent person.
- S16.2** A person must, after destroying a horse, ensure the horse is dead by observing three or more of the following signs:
- the horse has lost consciousness and there is no deliberate movement;
 - there are no rhythmic respiratory movements for at least five minutes;
 - there is no corneal blink reflex when an eyeball is touched;
 - the pupils are at maximum dilation and do not respond to light;
 - there is no heartbeat.

Recommended guidelines

- G16.1** Where a horse is shot, the recommended method is via a firearm aimed in the frontal position.
- G16.2** A horse should be handled quietly before euthanasia to ensure it is not unnecessarily distressed or alarmed.
- G16.3** A horse should not be euthanased in view of other horses.

Note

This chapter applies to euthanasia of horses for welfare reasons, slaughter or any other reason for destruction. A humane death is when an animal is either killed instantly or rendered insensible until death ensues, without pain, suffering or distress. When the health and welfare of a horse is irredeemably compromised, such as where they are terminally unwell or severely injured, euthanasia may be the most humane outcome.

A method of humane destruction causes rapid unconsciousness and then the horse's death while it is unconscious. Unconsciousness should be achieved by a single treatment, with minimal stress before loss of consciousness. Methods of humane destructions are:

- rapid intravenous injection of concentrated barbiturate solutions by a veterinarian;
- shooting by an experienced person, using an appropriate licensed firearm, appropriate ammunition and an appropriate method; and
- use of a penetrative captive-bolt gun of the appropriate size followed by pithing or exsanguination.

Unacceptable methods include cutting the throat without first rendering the horse unconscious, blunt trauma to the head, and injection of chemical agents that do not cause rapid unconsciousness.

The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments should be adhered to for horses held at abattoirs and knackeries. More information on the euthanasia of horses, including diagrams showing points of aim for firearms, can be found in the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines Land Transport of Livestock.

Section 4: Exercise and education

17. Exercise

Objective

To ensure that horses receive appropriate and sufficient exercise to promote and protect their health and welfare.

Minimum standards: Exercise

- S17.1** A person responsible for a horse must take reasonable steps to ensure the horse is provided with reasonable opportunity for exercise each day, unless under veterinary advice.
- S17.2** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the intensity and duration of exercise does not exceed the horse's ability for its age, size, strength, and fitness.
- S17.3** A person responsible for a horse must not use mechanical exercising equipment, such as walking machines or treadmills, unless the horse is under direct supervision.
- S17.4** A person responsible for a horse must ensure the horse is not exercised in conditions likely to cause heat stress, unless means to effectively cool the horse are available and applied to the horse to minimise the risk to the welfare of the horse.
- S17.5** A person responsible for a horse must not force a horse to exercise if the horse is suffering from an injury or illness likely to be exacerbated by exercise, unless:
 - (a) the injury or illness does not pose a risk to the welfare of the horse, or
 - (b) under veterinary advice.
- S17.6** A person responsible for a horse must not tie the horse to a moving vehicle where the horse's feet are in contact with the ground unless in accordance with the requirements in Appendix 5.

Recommended guidelines

- G17.1** Horses should not be subjected to excessive strenuous exercise, particularly young horses, unless they are appropriately conditioned.
- G17.2** A rider's weight should be matched to the horse's size, age, condition and ability to carry the rider's weight in a manner that does not place undue strain on the horse. It is recommended that the average horse should not carry more than 20% of their bodyweight.
- G17.3** A horse that is routinely confined should be spelled in a large paddock at least twice a year, for a minimum of two weeks each time.
- G17.4** When introducing unfit or spelled horses to exercise, their workload should be increased gradually to prevent injury and stress.
- G17.5** A horse should be warmed-up before, and cooled-down after, strenuous exercise.
- G17.6** Where a horse is tied to a moving vehicle for the purpose of exercise or any other reason where the horse's feet are in contact with the ground, the horse should be monitored by a person other than the driver.

Note

Both lack of exercise and overexertion can be detrimental to a horse's welfare. Horses may be exercised by turning them loose in a paddock for free exercise, riding, lunging, driving, leading, walking machines, treadmills, etc.

Not allowing horses the opportunity for free exercise on a daily basis can be detrimental to their welfare. However, there may be reasons why a horse is confined for extended periods, for example due to injury or recovery/rehabilitation or husbandry practices. Wherever possible, horses should be provided with daily free exercise by turning them out in a paddock. Where this is not possible due to intensive husbandry practices, horses should be spelled on a regular basis where they have access to free exercise.

It is important that the type and amount of exercise corresponds to the horse's age, reproductive status and physical and mental maturity. Strenuous exercise of young horses can risk musculoskeletal injuries, either immediately or later in life.

Tying a horse to a moving vehicle for exercise is considered high risk. Where it is undertaken, it must be in accordance with the strict conditions outlined in Appendix 5. For best practice, alternative methods of exercise should be sought. Where it is undertaken, consideration should be given to the positioning of each horse on the vehicle, giving particular thought to the age, capability, experience and personality of each horse.

Exercise in conditions of high temperature and humidity can lead to rapid and severe dehydration and heat stress, where appropriate mitigation measures are not put in place. See Appendix 6 for more information on managing horses in hot weather, including determining conditions likely to cause heat stress.

18. Education and training

Objective

To ensure training methods used on horses minimise risks to their health and welfare.

Minimum standards: Education and training

- S18.1** A person responsible for a horse must ensure training methods used on the horse are appropriate for the horse's age, size and condition.
- S18.2** A person must not:
- strike a horse unreasonably; or
 - force, prod, push or excessively handle a horse when it has no room to move, unless under veterinary advice.
- S18.3** A person must not use any training method that:
- causes pain, injury or fear in the horse intended to induce the horse to jump higher;
 - uses repeated or excessive force or deliberately causes a fear response from a horse as a form of punishment;
 - applies a chemical or any other irritating substance to any part of the horse's body for the purpose of training or enhancing performance;
 - uses force to cause the horse to maintain its head and neck in a posture that poses a risk to the welfare of the horse;
 - subjects the horse to relentless pressure from reins, side reins or any other training aids for a period that poses a risk to the welfare of the horse; or
 - deprives a horse of basic needs, such as food, water, light or rest.
- S18.4** A person must not use pharmaceutical agents to manipulate a horse's behaviour, unless under veterinary advice.
- S18.5** A person must not excessively exercise a horse for the purpose of causing fatigue.

Recommended guidelines

- G18.1** Persons engaged in the education and training of a horse should be experienced, or under direct supervision of an experienced person.
- G18.2** Training methods should be adapted to suit the individual horse and incorporate an understanding of horse behaviour and learning.
- G18.3** Veterinary advice should be sought if there is any doubt about the fitness of the horse for a particular purpose.

Note

Training is important to maintain the safety of the horse and the rider or handler. Any person involved in training, educating or caring for horses needs to have an understanding of horse behaviour and be able to understand how horses learn and communicate. Horses who show changes in behaviour or exhibit undesirable behaviour may be responding to pain and this should be investigated. Poor training methods can cause behavioural and welfare problems. Horses with problem behaviours are more vulnerable to neglect and rough handling, and can increase the risk of injury to the handler. They are more likely to face the prospect of multiple temporary owners attempting to manage their behaviour, or euthanasia.

19. Tack and equipment

Objective

To ensure that any equipment used on a horse is fit for purpose, maintained in good repair and minimises risks to the health and welfare of the horse.

Requirements under the Animal Welfare (General) Regulations 2003

The Animal Welfare (General) Regulations 2003 (General Regulations) prohibit the use of spurs that have sharpened or fully-fixed rowels, and spurs that are reasonably capable of penetrating the skin of the animal on which they are intended to be used. The General Regulations also prohibit the use of a device, other than an electric fence, that is designed or modified to deliver an electric shock to an animal. Currently, there is an exception to this for using an electric stock prod on a horse, for the purpose of controlling it at a rodeo. Where this is used, it must not be applied to the face, udder or genital organs of the horse.

Minimum standards: Tack and equipment

- S19.1** A person responsible for a horse must ensure that tack and equipment used on the horse is well fitting, does not cause the horse injury or pain, and is maintained in adequate and safe condition.
- S19.2** A person must not use a bit on a horse that:
 - (a) is made of wire, chain or rope; or
 - (b) has any sharp points or edges.
- S19.3** A person must not use tack or equipment on a horse that restricts a horse's circulation or breathing.
- S19.4** A person must not use sharp or cutting objects in or on any tack or equipment that makes contact with the horse's body.
- S19.5** A person must not use spurs in a manner that causes abrasions on the horse's skin or to cause pain or to punish a horse.
- S19.6** A person must not use whips on a horse:
 - (a) in a manner that cause abrasions, welts or any other injury on the horse's body;
 - (b) to punish the horse;
 - (c) to cause distress;
 - (d) on the head and genital region; or
 - (e) if the horse is too fatigued to respond.
- S19.7** A person must not use equipment on a horse that involves a chain or cable being placed over the horse's poll.
- S19.8** A person must not use a noseband that when fastened on the horse's head causes, directly or indirectly, pain or injury to the horse, or impedes the horse's breathing or circulation.

Recommended guidelines

- G19.1** A horse and rider should be adequately trained to use and understand the equipment they are using.
- G19.2** Whips or any other training sticks should only be used as a tool to help reinforce a handler's or rider's cues and not be used to cause fear or pain or to punish the horse.

- G19.3** There should be no abrasions, swellings or injuries on the horse's body from spurs, whips, bits or any other tack or equipment.
- G19.4** A person responsible for a horse should make an effort to understand the effects of any tack or equipment they are using on the welfare of the horse.
- G19.5** If a horse develops behavioural changes or other signs of discomfort, the activity should be ceased and tack or equipment investigated to ensure that it is not causing pain or discomfort to the horse.
- G19.6** A horse should be untacked during rest breaks.
- G19.7** Tack or equipment that forces the horse into a particular body posture should be avoided. Where used, it should be used with extreme care by competent persons for short periods only for the purpose of training.
- G19.8** The tightness of a noseband, measured between the noseband and the centre of the bridge of the horse's nose, should be no less than 3.8cm (approximately a two-finger high gap).
- G19.9** Minors should not be permitted to use whips or spurs unless the minor is sufficiently experienced and understands their use as a training aid and not for use as punishment of the horse.

Note

Horse owners need to understand and be familiar with the equipment they are using and should make every effort not to use equipment in a manner that compromises the horse's welfare.

All tack and equipment used on horses should be maintained in good condition and must fit the horse correctly. Ill-fitting equipment may cause sores, irritation, lameness, and may also cause the horse to respond to the irritation rather than the handler. A horse experiencing pain while being ridden is more likely to display flight and fear responses, which can endanger the rider.

Horses that suffer pain from ill-fitting or inappropriate use of tack and equipment may react by developing dangerous behaviours such as bucking, biting and rearing in an attempt to escape the pain and discomfort. The cause of such behaviours should always be investigated and addressed to prevent prolonged suffering and inadvertent punishment of a horse that is responding to that pain and discomfort, or is too tired to respond as desired.

It may be necessary to undertake retraining until the horse is safe and responsive without the requirement for escalating force to achieve control. If a person must rely on significant force to control their horse, the suitability of the horse and rider/handler combination should be evaluated. Tack and equipment should not be used as a short-cut for adequate training and experience.

See Appendix 7 for more information on tack and equipment.

20. Harness and carriage driving

Objective

To ensure any horse that is worked or driven in a harness is fit to do so, and is only exercised in a manner that minimises the risks to the health and welfare of the horse.

Minimum standards: Harness and carriage driving

- S20.1** A person responsible for a harness horse must ensure the surface of the ground on which the horse is exercised is appropriate for the type and weight of the horse-drawn vehicle.
- S20.2** A person responsible for a harness horse must ensure the harness:
- (a) does not have sharp edges or protrusions;
 - (b) is fitted in a manner that does not cause rubbing, chaffing or wounds on the skin; and
 - (c) does not impede the horse's movement or natural functions, such as breathing or circulation.
- S20.3** A person responsible for a harness horse must ensure that leverage or restricting equipment is not left on the horse for a period of time that poses a risk to the welfare of the horse.

Recommended guidelines

- G20.1** When halting on an incline, the horse-drawn vehicle should have chocks under the rear wheels, or the brake should be engaged.
- G20.2** If a leverage or restricting rein is used, a person responsible for a harness horse should ensure it is loose enough to allow the horse to stretch its neck with the exception of harness racing horses where the equipment should be used in accordance with the relevant harness racing rules.
- G20.3** Harness horses should be provided with regular opportunities to rest with equipment removed.
- G20.4** The driver of a horse-drawn vehicle should aim for smooth starts and stops.
- G20.5** The wheels and turntable of a horse-drawn vehicle should be lubricated regularly to reduce friction.
- G20.6** The harness should:
- (a) be designed to distribute the load or force over a large area (such as with padding or broad straps);
 - (b) transmit the energy from the horse directly to the horse-drawn vehicle; and
 - (c) have all joints / hinges on the outside, away from the horse's body.
- G20.7** The horse should be trained to accept the harness and safely pull the horse-drawn vehicle.
- G20.8** The following power to weight ratios should be followed and not exceeded:
- (a) Power to Weight ratio of 1:3 for flat smooth surfaces for a short distance;
 - (b) Power to Weight ratio of 1:2 on rough or slightly uneven ground;
 - (c) Power to Weight ratio of 1:1 on hills, sand or other uneven surfaces.

Note

Power-to-weight ratio

An important consideration for the welfare of harness horses is the weight of the harness vehicle and any occupants the horse or horses are being expected to pull. The power-to-weight ratio guidelines in G20.8 apply to horses that are mature, trained, fit, healthy and in good body condition. Weight of harness vehicles should be reduced for young horses, green horses and if any other reason, such as early in a fitness conditioning program, requires it. Other factors that influence the amount of weight a horse can comfortably pull include the road and terrain conditions, breed, age, training and physical capability and condition of the horse.

Restrictive or leverage equipment

Some harnesses are fitted with restrictive or leverage reins, such as check-reins, side checks, over-checks and others. These types of reins are designed to prevent a horse from moving its head in certain directions, often restricting the horse from putting its head down. The use of restrictive equipment that forces a horse to hold a specific body posture can cause discomfort and pain to the horse, especially when applied tightly with little room for the horse's head and neck to move. This type of equipment should not be used in place of adequate training and education of the horse. If it is used, it should be only for short periods, and should be removed or loosened immediately when the horse has finished working.

Carriage horses for events and tourist attractions

There are a number of specific considerations for horses that pull carts or carriages for events or tourist attractions. Carriage horses must not be overused and should be adequately rested between work. The urban environment can have welfare implications for carriage horses. Care should be taken to protect horses from noise, air pollution and collisions with motor vehicles. If horses are regularly driven on hard tarmac, there may be a significant toll on the integrity of the horse's hooves. The increased risk of unsoundness should be mitigated where possible, such as by providing a high standard of farriery and foot care, rest breaks, and access to soft surfaces. Horses that are unsound must not be driven. In urban areas with dense traffic, contingency arrangements should be made with a veterinary practice to provide emergency veterinary care when necessary.

Part 3 – Additional requirements for businesses that use horses and events involving horses

There are many types of businesses and events that involve horses, varying in their degree of use and responsibility for the horses used, including but not limited to:

- caring for, or providing treatment to, horses (such as care from farriers, veterinarians, equine dentists and body workers);
- keeping horses for others to ride (such as riding schools and horse hire establishments);
- using land to keep horses on (such as agistment centres);
- using horses for entertainment (such as circuses and rodeos); and
- running events for competition or training purposes.

Unless otherwise specified, the requirements in this Part are in addition to any relevant requirements in Part 2 of this document. Where businesses are not mentioned in Part 3, they are still to comply with the requirements in Part 2.

The additional requirements outlined in this Part are intended to safeguard horses from welfare, safety and health risks particularly associated with agistment, riding centres and events. These risks may be associated with horses being in a new and unfamiliar environment, and with several people being responsible for horses.

It is recommended that all businesses and organisations using horses develop a risk management plan to address potential health and welfare risks. The content of the risk management plan will depend on the nature of the business or event, and may include consideration of environmental conditions, access to infrastructure, use of tack and equipment and emergency management. A risk assessment should identify these risks and provide guidance on minimising welfare consequences.

Businesses should comply with any relevant code of practice adopted under the Animal Welfare Act, such as the Code of Practice for the Conduct of Circuses in Western Australia, or the Code of Practice for the Conduct of Rodeos in Western Australia.

21. Provision of care to horses – Agistment

Objective

To ensure horses have their health and welfare needs met during agistment.

Minimum standards: Agistment

- S21.1** A person responsible for a place offering agistment for horses must take reasonable measures in the design, construction, maintenance and operation of facilities to ensure the welfare, health and safety of horses kept on the property.
- S21.2** Where a person responsible for a place offering agistment for horses employs staff, the person must ensure the staff member is competent to care for the welfare of any horse under their care or be under the direct supervision of a competent person.

Recommended guidelines

- G21.1** An agistment property owner or occupier should record the full name, street address and contact telephone number of the owner of every horse agisted on their property.
- G21.2** A written agreement defining the conditions of the agistment should be made between the horse owner and the agistment property owner. The agreement should clearly set out at least the following:
- (a) the fee;
 - (b) the service to be provided;
 - (c) the name of the person responsible for supervision and provision of feed and water to the horse;
 - (d) the steps to be taken should the horse become sick or be injured;
 - (e) contact details for the preferred veterinarian; and
 - (f) a contingency plan for emergency situations such as fire, flood or disease outbreak including alternative arrangements for the care of the horse should the person in charge or the horse owner become incapacitated.

Note

A wide variety of agistment options are available in WA. The degree of care and attention provided to agisted horses is often in direct proportion to the fee charged.

Any person who is in charge of a horse can be prosecuted for cruelty under the Animal Welfare Act. The owner or occupier of a property where agistment is provided can be deemed under the Act to be a 'person in charge' of horses agisted on the property. A 'person in charge' of a horse is responsible for the welfare of the horse. The owner or occupier of a property offering agistment has a duty of care to ensure the welfare of the horse if it is abandoned by its owner, whether or not an agistment agreement is in place.

It is recommended that any agistment agreement between a property owner or occupier and horse owner is evidenced in writing with the terms of agistment and responsibility for the horse clearly described. A written agreement helps horse owners and property owners or occupiers by setting out their expectations and anticipating problems before they arise. This reduces the likelihood of unsatisfactory outcomes, legal expenses and adverse outcomes for horses.

22. Competition and events

Objective

To ensure the physical and behavioural needs of horses at competitions and events are met and risks to their health and welfare are minimised.

Minimum standards: Competition and events

- S22.1** A person responsible for a horse must not permit injured horses or horses in ill health to participate in events.
- S22.2** A person responsible for a horse in body condition score of less than 2 must ensure the horse does not participate in an event.
- S22.3** A person must not perform a procedure that poses a risk to the welfare of the horse for the purpose of enhancing or reducing performance for a competitive event.
- S22.4** A person responsible for an event must ensure risk management plans are employed if events are conducted under weather conditions likely to pose a risk to the welfare of the horse.
- S22.5** A person responsible for an event must ensure adequate facilities and equipment to cool horses are provided if events are conducted under conditions likely to lead to heat stress.

Recommended guidelines

- G22.1** Event organisers should have in place rules, policies and procedures that address all aspects of horse welfare during an event.
- G22.2** During an event a veterinarian should be available on call to attend the event within a reasonable timeframe.
- G22.3** During a competitive event a horse welfare officer or veterinarian should be appointed by the event organiser whose purpose is to monitor the welfare of horses at the event and alert event organisers to any concerns.
- G22.4** Horse welfare officers, gear checkers, stewards, and officials involved in an event should be experienced in recognising horse welfare problems.
- G22.5** Organisers of events should take immediate corrective action when alerted to horse welfare concerns during an event.

Note

For the purpose of this document, the term 'event' includes any situation where horses congregate to compete for prizes or for training, such as pony club, dressage competitions, campdrafts, endurance rides, race meets, horsemanship clinics, demonstrations, etc. The term 'competitive event' includes events where riders or handlers compete for prizes. The standards and guidelines in the other chapters of this document apply to all horses. This chapter provides additional requirements, which are either specific to, or more relevant for, horses at competitions and events.

In this section, the standards are either directed to a 'person responsible for a horse' or a 'person responsible for an event'. It is important to recognise there may be more than one person responsible at any one time. In the context of events, this could be the owner of the horse, the rider or handler, the event organiser or the owner of the property on which the event is held.

For competitive events, horses should compete only within the medication control rules of the competition or event. It is the responsibility of the competitor to be familiar with the event rules relating to prohibited substances.

Welfare officers

It is recommended that organisers of competitive events appoint a horse welfare officer to monitor the welfare of horses and alert officials as required. This may include ensuring that attendees are meeting these standards and any other standards required by the organising body. It is important that welfare officers have a thorough understanding of horse welfare and relevant policies and procedures, and are appropriately empowered to intervene as necessary.

Performance enhancing procedures

A range of procedures have been used historically to attempt to improve or modify a horse's performance in competition. Such procedures can include:

- doping a horse with performance-enhancing substances;
- applying sensitising or desensitising agents (tail blocking, nicking, botox injections, gingering tails etc.);
- hypersensitising or desensitising limbs;
- 'rapping' or other methods intended to induce a horse to jump higher or more carefully by inducing fear, pain or injury;
- using electric shock devices;
- exhausting a horse through the use of sleep deprivation or excessive exercise;
- causing fatigue of the horse's neck muscles by tying the horse's head excessively high for extended periods;
- blood-letting or blood-doping; and
- using aids such as tail weights.

These procedures can have detrimental effects on the welfare of the horse, and should never be performed. If they are detected in competition, disqualification should occur as a result. Many of these examples are cruelty offences and are in breach of section 19 of the Animal Welfare Act.

23. Riding schools and horse hire establishments

Objective

To ensure horses have their health and welfare needs met during use at a riding school or horse hire establishment.

Minimum standards: Riding schools and horse hire establishments

- S23.1** A person responsible for an establishment must ensure the number of staff is sufficient to maintain the welfare, safety and health of the horses kept at the establishment.
- S23.2** A person responsible for an establishment must ensure horses are not used in riding centres if they:
- do not have their central adult incisors in wear;
 - have a body condition score of less than 2;
 - in the case of mares, are more than 35 weeks pregnant, or lactating and in the first three months after foaling;
 - are unfit because of age-related conditions; or
 - are known to be or suspected of being injured or ill, except as advised by a veterinarian.

Recommended guidelines

- G23.1** Where stallions are used, they should be used only by an experienced rider under advanced tuition.
- G23.2** Inexperienced riders should be supervised by a competent person to ensure the welfare of the horse is not compromised by inappropriate handling.
- G23.3** Programs should be planned to prevent overwork and allow appropriate spelling, with consideration to the workload and temperament of each individual horse.
- G23.4** Where horses are used on rides of extended duration, such as over multiple days, staff should ensure that adequate provision is made for horses who cannot continue the ride. Spare horses should be available for rotation.
- G23.5** Accurate and up-to-date records should be kept relating to the identity, health and care of horses kept at the establishment.
- G23.6** Contingency plans should be in place to protect the safety of horses kept at the establishment in the event of an emergency and should include evacuation procedures, where appropriate.

Note

People responsible for horses at riding schools and horse hire establishments must have relevant knowledge, experience and skills to follow protocols for care and management. Staff should be aware of their responsibilities and be competent to carry them out. All establishments should have public liability and professional indemnity insurance cover.

As a general rule, during a lesson or group ride, there should be one staff member for every eight horses, with a minimum of two staff members. Extra supervision may be necessary for beginner riders, or when taking a horse out of its usual environment, such as on trail rides. Care should be taken to select a suitable and safe horse for each rider, taking into account the age, size, experience, riding ability and any known handicap or limitation of the rider. The horse should also be matched to the task expected of it.

Appendix 1: Conditions under which horses are kept

Safety

Housing for horses should be constructed so that horses are safe with minimal risk of injury or illness. The risk of injury increases where horses are overcrowded and competition for space, food and water occurs. Fixtures and fittings such as gate latches, hay racks and feed and water troughs should be free of sharp edges and positioned to avoid injury, particularly to the eyes. Persons keeping horses should be aware of the potential health risks of using treated wood products in housing structures.

Confined spaces

Horses that spend time in confined spaces, such as stables, have an increased susceptibility to air pollution, especially dust. Several equine respiratory disorders are directly caused or exacerbated by inhalation of airborne particles such as dust. Factors that influence the air quality in confined spaces include the type of bedding, removal of manure and ventilation. Care should be taken to minimise the levels of ammonia and their effects, where possible. At high concentrations, ammonia can irritate the airways, damage the respiratory tract and contribute to pneumonia.

Behavioural and social needs

Housing systems should provide conditions that encourage the horse's natural behaviours as much as possible. Permanent housing of horses in stables or yards will not generally meet the full spectrum of horses' behavioural and social needs. Confinement or isolation for long periods without access to exercise or stimulation are risk factors for developing stress responses and abnormal behaviours, such as stereotypies. Wherever possible, horses should be allowed social contact with other horses, irrespective of the husbandry system. When constructing stables, consideration should be given to ensuring horses will be able to see each other.

To improve the welfare of the horse if stabling is used, it is necessary to provide stimulation. This can include exercise, time out at pasture, social interaction, and environmental enrichment. A helpful way to relieve confinement-related frustration in stabled and yarded horses is the use of slow-feeder hay nets and other feeding systems that encourage natural foraging behaviour and increase the amount of time that a horse spends foraging.

Shelter

While horses can tolerate a wide variation in climate, adequate shelter is necessary to minimise the effects of climatic extremes that can result in heat and cold stress. Shelter can consist of either man-made structures or natural shelters such as large trees or rows of trees. Shelter is required to provide shade in hot weather and protection from rain and prevailing winds during inclement weather. Horse rugs are not an acceptable substitute for the provision of shade and shelter. While not all horses will always seek shelter in hot or inclement weather, it is important they have the option to do so.

Design of shelters plays an important role in shelter-seeking behaviour of horses. Horses are less likely to use shelters that are very enclosed, and therefore reduce the range of vision, or shelters that have restricted air movement, particularly in hot weather. When planning or constructing new housing structures, ensure horses have the necessary means of reducing heat stress. This could include both adequate shelter, whether man-made or natural, and sprinkler systems.

Appendix 2: Ill health

Signs of ill health in horses

As prey animals, horses attempt to hide signs of pain from those around them. As such, signs of pain can be subtle and may be difficult to interpret. There are many possible causes of pain, from simple problems like muscle soreness to more serious diseases such as laminitis and colic (abdominal pain). It is recommended to seek advice if a horse is suffering from pain. Generally, signs of pain and ill health in horses can include:

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pawing at the ground • pointing with affected limbs • flank watching • rolling on the ground or lying down more than usual • teeth grinding • change in appetite or drinking habits • lack of, or a change in, defecation • shifting weight regularly and not bearing weight on all legs • limbs held in an unusual position • abnormal gait or lameness (see Table 1 below) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a 'tucked up' or abnormal body posture • lack of desire to exercise • excessive sweating • unexplained weight loss • muscle tremors • increased respiratory rate • reduced reactivity to the environment • separation from social group • behavioural changes such as appearing depressed, anxious or restless • any signs of disease such as discharge from the eye, ear or nose, coughing or breathing difficulty |
|---|--|

There are also facial signs that can indicate a horse may be in pain. These signs can include low or asymmetrical ear positions, facial and muzzle tension with 'frowning' or 'lightly puckered eyes', fixed stares and dilated nostrils.

Lameness

Lameness is a term used to describe an abnormal stance or gait. Table 1 can be used to grade the severity of lameness observed in horses.

Table 1: Equine lameness assessment

| Score | Equine lameness assessment |
|-------|---|
| 0 | Lameness not perceptible under any circumstances |
| 1 | Lameness difficult to observe, not consistently apparent regardless of circumstances (e.g. weight carrying, circling, inclines, hard surface) |
| 2 | Lameness difficult to observe at a walk to trot in a straight line (e.g. weight carrying, circling, inclines, hard surface) |
| 3 | Lameness consistently observable at a trot under all circumstances |
| 4 | Lameness obvious, marked nodding, hitching and/or shortened stride |
| 5 | Lameness obvious, minimal weight bearing in motion or rest, inability to move |

Source: American Association of Equine Practitioners Scale of Lameness Grading (1984)

Lameness can be caused by a variety of factors, including skin wounds, muscle pain, joint inflammation, tendon and ligament injury, bone injury or hoof damage. The treatment of lameness will depend on its cause. It is recommended that advice from a farrier or veterinarian is sought where a horse is exhibiting lameness.

Colic

Colic is a term broadly used to describe abdominal pain in horses. Colic is common in horses, but the cause and severity varies greatly. People responsible for horses should be able to recognise signs of colic to enable prompt treatment. Common signs of colic include:

| | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looking and/or kicking at flank • frequent rolling • continuous attempts to lie down • pawing at the ground • lack of, or infrequent, defecation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor appetite and water intake • excessive sweating • lack of normal gut noises • stretching out as if to urinate • distention of the abdomen |
|--|---|

Where a horse is suspected to be suffering from colic, advice should be sought from a veterinarian at the earliest opportunity.

It may be necessary to take measures to prevent a horse from suffering from colic. Such preventative measures include:

- ensuring the horse has constant access to fresh, clean water;
- avoiding placement of hay directly on the ground, especially in sandy areas;
- ensuring the horse has unlimited access to roughage;
- ensuring the paddock is not likely to be overgrazed, leading to ingestion of sand;
- regular control of parasites, such as worms; and
- reducing stress levels in the horse, such as by ensuring their behavioural needs are met and not carrying out activities likely to cause stress.

It is also recommended to increase monitoring for signs of colic following changes in:

- diet
- the level or intensity of exercise
- duration of stabling or
- stress levels.

First aid kit

The following items are recommended to keep in a first aid kit for horses. The kit should be checked and restocked regularly so that it is always available in the event of an emergency.

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stethoscope • thermometer • bandages • elastoplast • cotton wool roll • non-stick dressing • gauze swabs • syringes and needles • antiseptic • electrolytes • poultice • icepack | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rubber gloves • scrub brush • scissors • duct tape • flyspray • rope • torch • marker pen • notebook • wirecutters • vital signs chart • emergency contacts |
|---|--|

Appendix 3: Requirements for food and water

Water

The basic maintenance requirement of water for horses is estimated to be 5 to 5.5 litres per 100kg bodyweight per day provided the horse is also consuming adequate food:

- Ponies (200–300kg body weight) require 10–15 litres daily.
- Light horses (300–450kg body weight) require 15–25 litres daily.
- Horses (450–500kg body weight) require 25–30 litres daily.

These requirements will increase with many factors, including; increased humidity or ambient temperature, food intake and type, a diet high in salt or potassium, the presence of some health conditions or an increase in the horse's metabolic activity level (such as growth, work and lactation). Up to two or three times this minimum could be required. For example, on a hot summer day an adult horse may require up to **90L of water**.

Water quality

Providing sufficient water not only relates to checking there is water in a trough or bucket, but also to ensuring there are no harmful contaminants, and that the horse feels comfortable to drink.

Horses may limit their intake of water to the point of dehydration if the quality (palatability) of drinking water is compromised or if the water is provided in an unfamiliar manner (such as in dams). In cold weather, horses often reduce their water intake, and can be reluctant to drink if the water is cold. They may also limit their intake of water at a new location or from a new source. When moving to a new paddock or stabling, care should always be taken to ensure that horses are drinking.

High salinity is a common problem in groundwater and inland water runoff in WA. Care should be taken to ensure drinking water for horses does not contain high salt concentrations. The salt concentration of a horse's water should never exceed 6000mg/L.

Feed

As a general rule, horses require approximately 1.2–3% of their bodyweight in feed daily. Horses are grazing animals with a specialised digestive system designed for diets containing large amounts of plant fibre (roughage). Horses should not be fed large meals; rather they should be permitted to forage on roughage constantly and hard feed should be spread over two or more feeds per day.

Pasture

The type and quality of pasture is important. In some cases, good quality pastures containing suitable grasses and legume can provide all the necessary food requirements for a horse. However, good pasture management is necessary to ensure adequate nutrition, avoid over-grazing, to aid worm control and manage weeds.

If horses are not provided with supplementary feed, the land where horses are kept must be capable of sustaining all of the animals roaming on it. Unimproved pastures may have a high quantity of grasses and look abundant, but may be nutrient deficient, and therefore additional supplementation will be required. At the other extreme, unlimited access to nutrient-dense pasture can contribute to health problems such as obesity and laminitis.

Concentrates

Concentrates such as grains or pellets may be used to increase the energy and nutrient content of a horse's diet. Premixed concentrates for horses can be a convenient way to provide concentrates.

However, the over-feeding of concentrates can put a horse at serious risk. Horses should not be fed more than 0.5% of their body weight in concentrates per feed. The safety of different grains and their preparation needs to be taken into consideration. The introduction of concentrates should be gradual and tailored to the nutritional requirements of the horse. If required, advice should be sought before commencing the feeding of concentrates and increasing the quantity in the diet.

Where the concentrate does not provide sufficient levels of sodium chloride, horses should have access to salt, which may be provided as a ration or as free access (a block or loose salt). Other supplements may be required for animals with deficiencies, depending on the horse's age, physiological status and level of exercise.

Items that may pose a risk

Care should be taken to provide horses only feedstuffs appropriate for the species. For example, ingestion of feed made for ruminants or chickens can be fatal to horses. Hay should be tested for annual ryegrass toxicity before feeding. As horses are prone to ingest poisonous plants, paddocks should be carefully examined for poisonous plants and the plants removed before allowing horses access.

Sand ingestion is a major contributing factor to colic in horses in WA. Efforts should be made to minimise sand ingestion by the horse by providing hay and hard feed in containers and limiting access to grazing on sandy soils when pasture begins to grow.

Feed storage

Feed storage is important to maintain food safety and quality. Feed should be stored in dry, rodent-proof bins. Hay should be stored in a dry area on raised pallets to improve air circulation. Feed that has become wet often develops mould which can cause colic and death in horses. The quality of feed kept in storage should be monitored.

Feed containers

In order to decrease the risk of colic and minimise food wastage, supplementary feeds should be fed in non-spill containers, rather than directly onto the ground. The use of 'slow feeders' are useful in horses that have limited access to pasture by encouraging horses to exhibit their natural grazing behaviour and reducing frustration in confined horses.

Nosebags

Horses may be fed using a bag secured over the horse's nose (nosebag). Care must be taken when feeding horses with nosebags. Nosebags should have smooth edges to prevent injury to horses' eyes and nosebags should allow water to escape from the bag in the event that a horse attempts to drink while wearing a nosebag. If nosebags are watertight they can quickly cause a horse to drown. Nosebags should be removed as soon as a horse has finished eating and care must be taken when using nosebags in hot or humid weather to ensure the horse is able to breathe effectively.

Appendix 4: Body condition scoring

A common system of condition scoring uses a 0 to 5 scale, starting at 0 for a severely emaciated horse up to 5 to describe obese horses. Condition is assessed by visual appraisal and manually feeling fat cover of the six major areas of the horse. These areas are identified on the image below.

If a horse fails to maintain adequate body condition, owners need to make an effort to determine the cause and take corrective action. Advice should be sought from an experienced equine nutritionist or veterinarian. If actions fail to result in an increase in body condition above the minimum acceptable body condition score, this may be an indication of a decline in health and welfare and euthanasia may be necessary on humane grounds.

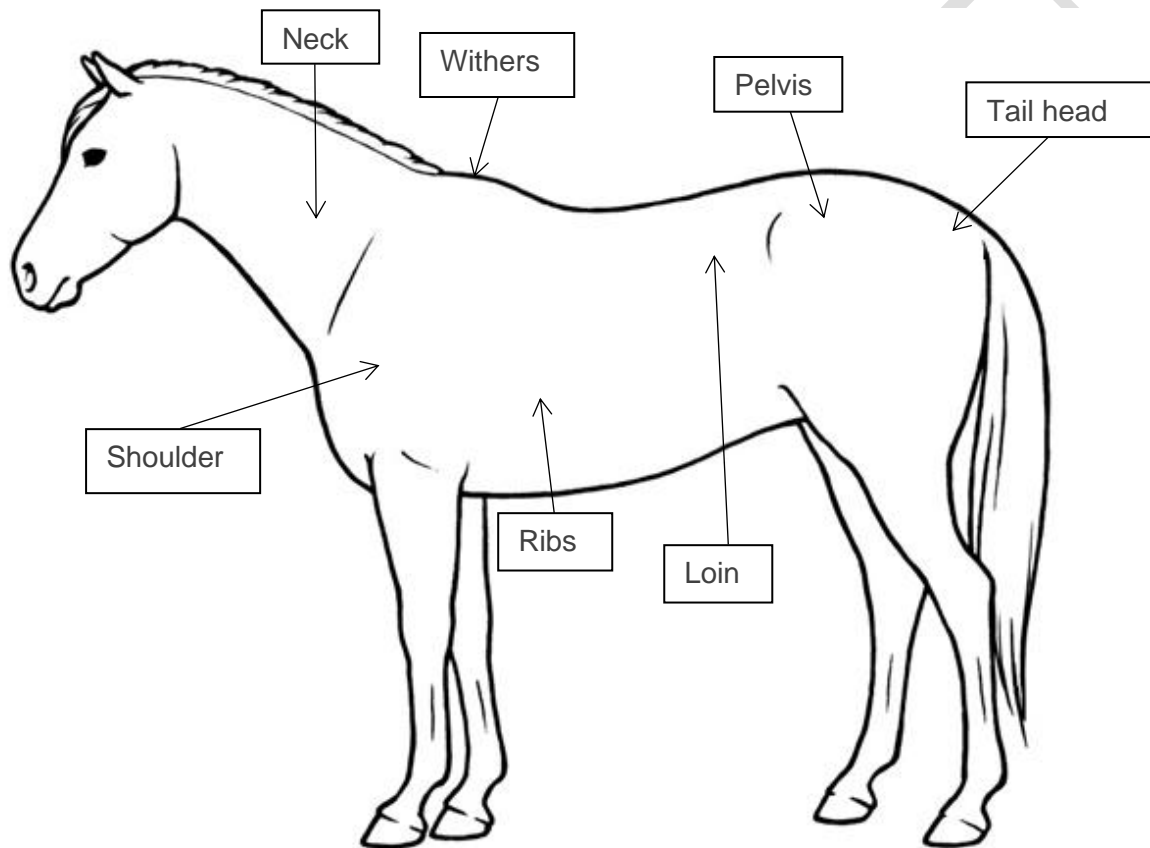
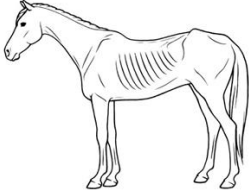
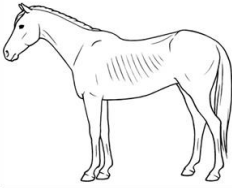
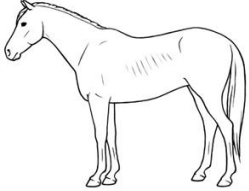
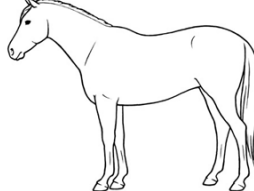
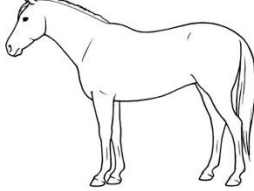
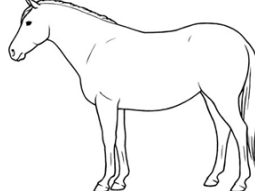


Image source: What's the Score: Body Condition Scoring for Livestock, Agdex CD 400/40-1. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Canada (www.agriculture.alberta.ca).

| Body Condition Score 0 | Body Condition Score 1 | Body Condition Score 2 | Body Condition Score 3 | Body Condition Score 4 | Body Condition Score 5 |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| VERY POOR | POOR | MODERATE | GOOD | FAT | OBESE |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| NECK | Obvious 'ewe' neck which is narrow and slack at the base | 'Ewe' neck still narrow and slack | Narrow and firm, blending smoothly into the body | Firm neck with some fat deposits No crest | Wide firm neck with a slight crest | Very wide and firm neck with an obvious crest |
| WITHERS AND SHOULDERS | Bone structure easily visible | Well defined | Withers rounded over the top | Some fat behind the shoulder | Along withers and behind shoulder filled with fat | Bulging fat |
| LOIN AND RIBS | Individual ribs and vertebrae visible and easily felt Tissue either side of backbone sunken | Ribs and vertebrae easily visible | Ribs just visible Vertebrae still felt Backbone well covered | Ribs covered but still felt No 'gutter' along the back | Need firm pressure to feel ribs 'Gutter' along the back to the tail | Cannot feel the ribs Deep 'gutter' along the back |
| TAIL HEAD AND PELVIS | Rump is sunken Angular pelvis and tight skin Deep cavity under tail | Rump sunken but skin supple No fat around tail with hip bones visible Deep depression under tail | Fat around tail head Rump flat either side of backbone Slight cavity under tail | Fat round the tail Rump round shape No 'gutter' along backbone | Pelvis only felt with firm pressure 'Gutter' along backbone to the tail head | Cannot feel the pelvis Deep 'gutter' along backbone |

Images source: What's the Score: Body Condition Scoring for Livestock, Agdex CD 400/40-1. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Canada (www.agriculture.alberta.ca).

Appendix 5: Tying horses to moving vehicles

To comply with standard S17.6, a horse must not be tied to a moving vehicle where the horse's feet are in contact with the ground, for the purpose of exercise or any other reason, unless all of the following conditions are met:

- the vehicle is specifically set up or modified for tying and exercising horses in a safe manner;
- the vehicle does not move faster than a horse can comfortably trot or move in a slow pacing action whilst the horse is tied to it;
- the speed of the vehicle is slow enough for the least experienced or slowest horse attached to the vehicle;
- the driver of the vehicle is 16 years old or over and is not under the influence of drugs or alcohol;
- the number of horses tied to the vehicle does not exceed the maximum number of horses the vehicle is designed for;
- the horse is over 18 months of age;
- the horse is adequately halter-trained and does not pull against pressure;
- the horse is wearing a halter with wide straps such as a leather or webbing halter (not a rope halter);
- the horse is not tied-up with reins or a lead attached to a bit in the horse's mouth;
- the lead is not tied around the horse's body and attached to the vehicle;
- the lead is tied to the vehicle at a height and length that prevents stepping over or onto the lead;
- if more than one horse is tied, the horses are tied in such a way that they cannot interfere with one another;
- the horse is tied to the vehicle in such a way that it can be untied quickly in the event of an accident, even if there is pressure on the rope (e.g. tied with a panic strap or breakaway device);
- the surface on which the horse is moving is suitable and of an appropriate material to reduce the risk of the horse stumbling; and
- the horse is constantly monitored and the vehicle stops immediately if a horse stumbles, falls or comes loose.

Appendix 6: Exercising horses in hot weather

Factors that contribute to heat stress in horses

Horses shed excess heat through sweating and having air moving over them. Heat stress after exercise is most likely to be seen on days when both the ambient temperature and relative humidity are high, and wind speeds are low or absent. Heat stress can also occasionally be seen during the cooler months, especially in spring when the days are warm, but horses are still carrying a winter coat.

The susceptibility of a horse to heat stress is not solely influenced by environmental conditions. Certain factors can increase risk of suffering heat stress. These include travelling long distances prior to exercise, an excitable temperament, horse health and fitness, rugs, heavy sweating and withholding drinking water.

Preventing heat stress in horses

When assessing the environmental conditions, the best method to use is the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) index. The WBGT index is a measure of the heat stress in direct sunlight, which takes into account temperature, humidity, wind speed, sun angle and cloud cover. The WBGT index is the validated heat index used by the Federation Equestre Internationale and Equestrian Australia. The Bureau of Meteorology publishes daily WBGT information on their website, under their Thermal Comfort Observations webpages. Unless horses are exercised in full shade, the WBGT should be measured in direct sun.

As a general rule, once the WBGT Index reaches 30, precautions will need to be implemented to reduce the heat load on horses and prevent poor welfare outcomes. The precautions will depend on the circumstance, and may include avoiding exercise at all, or at least minimising its frequency, duration and intensity. It may be necessary to alter the time or location of the exercise, to the coolest part of the day, and/or to grassed riding surfaces or shaded areas. Other precautions may include providing regular rest breaks, access to shade and water and active cooling after exercise.

Signs of heat stress

Horses should be regularly monitored in hot conditions for signs of heat stress:

- rapid, shallow breathing
- flared nostrils
- staggering, apparently uncontrollable gait
- very high body temperature
- agitated and distressed appearance
- unpredictable behaviour such as lashing out with hind limbs
- collapse.

Active cooling

Active cooling refers to cooling of a horse by applying cool water and/or air currents to the horse, such as using fans or sprinklers. Where a horse is exercised in hot conditions, there must be means to effectively cool the horse. Evaporative cooling is the most important means of dissipation of body heat for horses. Liberal application of cold water in shaded, well-ventilated places will greatly assist horses in dissipating excessive body heat on hot days. Placing the horse under misting fans can also be of great assistance.

Appendix 7: Equipment used on horses

Spurs

As horses have sensitive skin, spurs should be applied with minimal pressure, used only as a training aid to enhance the signal from the rider's leg. It is a cruelty offence to use spurs that are reasonably capable of penetrating the horse's skin, or with sharpened or fully-fixed rowels.

Whips

When used correctly, a whip is used as a training aid by means of negative reinforcement. Aversive stimuli, including a whip, used to provoke a response should be used appropriately and minimally so that habituation and stress are avoided. A whip should not replace adequate training, and excessive or incorrect whipping of horses is not acceptable. Whips must not be used to cause pain, punish a horse, or force a horse towards its physical limit.

Bits

The use of bits can have an impact on the welfare of a horse. In the wrong hands even a well-fitting bit can hurt a horse. Both sudden 'jerking' pressure and unrelenting pressure creates pain. Pressure should never be applied to the bit as a means of punishing a horse.

Nosebands

A common piece of tack that can cause significant pain and discomfort to horses is tight nosebands. Tightening a noseband stops a horse from being able to express normal behaviour, such as opening the mouth in an attempt to escape painful bit pressure. Care should be taken to ensure that nosebands do not push the horse's cheek against its teeth. It is widely recommended that nosebands should be no tighter than 'two fingers', measured between the bridge of the horse's nose (midline) and the noseband. For consistency, it is recommended that a taper gauge set to 3.87cm is used to ensure that a noseband is not too tight. However, if a taper gauge is unavailable, a 'two finger' measurement can be used.

Halters

Horses should not be turned out with halters. If a halter is necessary, the halter should have a breaking point to reduce the likelihood of injury if the halter catches on an object. Halters need to be removed regularly and checked for fit, especially on young, growing horses.

Training equipment

Tack or equipment that forces a horse into a particular body posture, such as side reins, chambons, tie-downs, draw-reins, and similar equipment should be used with extreme care by experienced persons for short periods only, generally less than 10 minutes at a time. This type of equipment should not be used in place of adequate training to teach the horse to carry itself in the desired posture. Training equipment or methods that adversely interfere with a horse's breathing or circulation, or force excessive hyperflexion of the horse's neck, should not be used.

Electric devices

It is a cruelty offence to use a device that is designed or modified to deliver an electric shock on a horse (other than an electric fence). Currently, there is an exception for using an electric stock prod on a horse at a rodeo, under certain circumstances. It is unacceptable to use electric devices on a horse to enhance performance, or decrease the incidence of stereotypic behaviour. These aversive devices may render the horse physically unable to perform the behaviour, without addressing the underlying cause. They are not an appropriate treatment.