



NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 3 - Horses in riding centres and boarding stables

Preface

This code is designed for everyone involved in the holding and care of horses in boarding stables and agistment or riding centres, including trail riding and trekking. By adhering to the code, people involved in these industries are demonstrating to the general community their concern for the welfare of the animals in their care.

Animal welfare can be thought of as the way an animal's health and well-being are affected by its interaction with its physical and social environments. Since humans can alter or control an animal's environment, animal welfare means that people have duties and responsibilities towards animals. The greater the level of interference with, or control of, an animal's environment, the greater our responsibilities.

The code is neither a complete manual on animal husbandry, nor a static document. It may be revised to take account of advances in the understanding of animal physiology and behaviour, technological changes changing industry standards, and the community's attitudes and expectations about the welfare of animals.

Compliance with the code does not remove the need to abide by the requirements of any other laws and regulations, such as local government or National Parks and Wildlife Service legislation.

The code has been prepared in consultation with the Equestrian Federation of Australia (NSW) and the Australian Horse Riding Centres representing a number of those involved with these industries, and is endorsed by the NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Council.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This code sets standards for the care and management of horses in riding centres and boarding stables.
- 1.2 It applies to the welfare of horses held and cared for in these establishments.

2. Responsibilities of the manager

2.1 The Manager of a riding centre or boarding stable is responsible for:

- (a) Providing adequate facilities, equipment, feed, water, supervision and care to ensure the welfare of the horses held
- (b) supervising the daily feeding, watering and inspection of the horses to ensure their well-being
- (c) maintaining the hygiene of the premises and the health of the horses
- (d) providing prompt veterinary or other appropriate treatment in cases of illness or injury
- (e) supervising staff, whether working full or part-time and whether or not for fee or reward
- (f) collecting and maintaining relevant records.

3. Accommodation and facilities for horses

3.1 Riding centres and boarding stables must have an adequate water supply, and should be located away from noise or pollution that could cause injury or stress to horses.

3.2 Horses in stables, collecting yards and paddocks should have sufficient protection against sun, wind and rain and extremes of temperature. Shade trees, roofing, windbreaks and rugs may be necessary.

3.3 Horse enclosures must be designed and maintained to prevent injury, disease and escape. Methods used to achieve this include the following:

3.3.1 Provide enclosures with secure closing devices that cannot be opened by the horses held.

3.3.2 Use fencing material that is clearly visible to horses.

3.3.3 Build collecting yards with post and rail fencing using timber or steel piping and steel or concrete posts. Barbed wire, prefabricated wire and high tensile fencing can injure horses severely, and should not be used for collecting and handling yards. The fences for handling yards should be high enough to prevent escape.

3.3.4 Provide floors (of yards, sheds and stables) with surfaces that permit adequate drainage and allow horses to stand and walk normally.

- 3.3.5 Make gates at least 1.3 metres wide to stables, yards and paddocks. Swinging stable doors should open outwards.
- 3.3.6 Use stables that are at least 2.5 metres high, with a floor area of at least 12 square metres for each horse or 9 square metres for each pony under 12 hands.
- 3.3.7 Provide appropriate stable bedding that is clean and sufficiently thick.
- 3.3.8 Ensure stables are ventilated enough to keep them free of dampness and noxious odour without draughts.
- 3.3.9 House horses in a dust free environment wherever possible.
- 3.3.10 Use lighting that is as natural as possible and that can be used for thorough inspection of horses. Horses should not be subjected to continuous artificial lighting.
- 3.3.11 Keep paddocks free of noxious plants and rubbish that may injure horses.

3.4 Cleanliness

- 3.4.1 Stables and yards must be kept clean. Urine affected bedding and manure must be removed at least once a day.
- 3.4.2 Efforts must be made to effectively control of pests including ticks, flies, lice, mosquitoes and rodents, under professional supervision if applicable.
- 3.4.3 Disposal of manure, bedding, food wastes and animal bodies should be prompt and hygienic.

3.5 Food and Water

- 3.5.1 Horses must have appropriate food and water, sufficient to keep them in good health and body condition.
- 3.5.2 For advice on specific feed requirements you can contact veterinary surgeons, government departments of Agriculture and university departments of animal husbandry.
- 3.5.3 Horses need salt (added to the feed or as a salt lick) and a regular supply of fresh, clean water. As a guide, 25-45 litres a day may be needed in hot weather. Mares need extra feed and water when they are pregnant or lactating.
- 3.5.4 When pasture is available but supplementation is necessary, horses should be fed at least once a day. They should be fed at least twice a day where there is no access to pasture.
- 3.5.5 Feeding diets high in cereal grain to horses that are ridden infrequently can produce unpredictable temperament changes which can be dangerous for a rider.
- 3.5.6 Feed should be free from contamination such as mould, dust, insecticides or other substances that could be toxic.
- 3.5.7 Feed should be stored in the best practical way to prevent deterioration [for example; store chaff in dry, rodent proof bins, and store hay in a dry area on raised pallets to allow air circulation].
- 3.5.8 Horses must be able to easily reach feed and water containers. The containers should be firmly fixed if possible, non toxic, easily cleaned and kept clean.
- 3.5.9 Automatic and manually filled watering systems should be checked daily. If horses are working during the day, they should have water available at regular intervals when they are resting.
- 3.5.10 On treks, horses must be allowed sufficient time to drink from natural water sources. If feed must be changed before a trek, this should be done gradually over a period of days.

4. Management

4.1 Equipment

- 4.1.1 All equipment which may affect the safety and welfare of horses and riders should be designed and maintained to avoid injury and disease.
- 4.1.2 Saddles that touch the mid-line of the horse's back or that have broken trees must not be used.
- 4.1.3 Saddle blankets should give enough padding and be dry and clean.
- 4.1.4 Tack should be appropriate for and fit each horse on which it is used.

4.2 Care of Horses

- 4.2.1 As far as possible, horses should be protected from stress or injury. Methods that should be used to achieve this include:

- providing the space for each horse in a group to reach sufficient feed (for example, give each horse a separate feed container, at least 4 m apart)
- segregating colts, stallions, weanlings, pregnant mares and sick horses from other groups if necessary
- providing sufficient provision of horses in stables, collecting yards and, as far as possible, when they are being ridden

4.2.2 Horses must be of a suitable size, conformation, disposition, fitness, and have adequate education for the purpose for which they are used.

4.2.3 Horses that must not be used for work in riding centres include:

- horses under 3 years of age,
- horses in poor body condition,
- mares that are more than 8 months pregnant, or are in the first three months after foaling,
- horses known to be or suspected of being injured or ill, except as advised by a veterinary surgeon.

4.2.4 Horses should be groomed before saddling, and particular care should be taken to remove sweat and dirt from areas under the saddle, girth and bridle. The back and girth areas should be cleaned and inspected when unsaddling.

4.2.5 Horses should, as far as possible, be ridden in a controlled manner and at a speed that is safe for horse and rider, considering the ground, the weather, and the experience of the rider.

4.2.6 Horses should not be overworked. Horses that show signs of tiredness or distress during work should be rested until fully recovered. Programs must be planned to prevent overwork and allow appropriate spelling of horses.

4.2.7 Continuously stabled horses should be exercised at least once a day. This may be done by riding, lunging or releasing them into a large yard for at least one hour a day. Horses that are stabled long term should be spelled outside at least once a year.

4.2.8 Horses should be spelled as often as necessary to maintain welfare, with consideration to the workload and the individual temperament of the animal.

4.2.9 After working, stabled horses should be hosed, sponged or brushed to remove sweat and dirt.

4.2.10 In cold weather, horses should be dried after working.

4.2.11 When introducing new or spelled horses, increase their workload gradually.

4.2.12 The number of staff provided to supervise a group of riders should be sufficient to ensure each horse's welfare is maintained, and as a general rule should be one staff member per 10 horses.

4.2.13 Horses should not be tied up by reins attached to the bit unless the attachment includes an easily breakable component such as plastic or string.

4.2.14 Whips and spurs should only be used as training aids by experienced riders. It is illegal to use spurs with sharpened rowels.

4.2.15 In cold weather, horses that are in poor condition or have not grown a long coat should be rugged with a waterproof rug.

4.3 Fire Safety

4.3.1 Staff should have easy access to appropriate fire fighting equipment. They must be trained and practised in using the equipment.

4.3.2 Any security methods must allow for ready access to horses and quick evacuation of staff and horses in an emergency.

4.3.3 Precautions to improve fire safety in stables should include:

- enough exits for horses (about one exit per five stables)
- exits that are wide enough (at least 1.3 m for stable doors and 2 m for aisle exits)
- fire hose reels that are long enough to reach all stables.
- adequate water pressure
- fire hoses of adequate diameter
- storage of flammable items in an area separated from the stables.
- sliding stable doors that don't block corridors.
- smoke detectors in enclosed buildings.
- "no smoking" signs in stable areas.
- an enforced non-smoking policy in the stable area.

4.4 Record Keeping

Appropriate records should be kept for each horse, as part of good business management and a health care program.

4.5 Staff

4.5.1 Staff should respect horses and have experience in handling them.

4.5.2 Staff should be aware of their responsibilities and be competent to carry them out.

4.5.3 Formal training, such as a Technical College qualification in horse husbandry, is encouraged.

4.6 Health Care

4.6.1 Owners of animals being boarded must be asked to sign an agreement authorising provision of necessary veterinary treatment.

4.6.2 The animal boarding establishment manager should establish liaison with a veterinary surgeon who is able to attend to any animals in his or her care, and is also able to advise on disease prevention measures.

4.6.3 The health and comfort of each horse needs to be checked. Horses which are stabled or confined to stable yards, boxes or small paddocks should be checked at least once a day to ensure that they are receiving appropriate food and water and are free from disease, distress and injury, while horses confined in broadacre situations must be inspected regularly.

4.6.4 If signs of disease or injury are observed, appropriate treatment must be promptly provided to protect the health of individual horses and prevent the spread of disease.

4.6.5 Signs of illness or injury for which veterinary treatment should be sought include:

- nasal discharge
- runny or inflamed eyes
- coughing
- laboured breathing
- lameness
- inability or reluctance to stand or walk
- fits or staggering
- severe diarrhoea
- bleeding, swelling or ulcerating of body parts
- unexplained weight loss
- apparent pain
- inability to urinate or defecate
- repeated or continuous rolling, pawing, kicking at abdomen or sweating
- poor appetite
- dropping food or chewing with difficulty
- excessive distress during work
- excessive scratching or hair loss.

4.6.6 If necessary, horses that are ill should be stabled, separated or isolated and appropriate facilities must be available for their care.

4.6.7 A basic first aid kit for horses should be carried when they are ridden into remote areas where prompt veterinary attention cannot be provided in case of injury or illness. The kit may include:

- cotton wool
- bandages and wound dressings
- adhesive dressings
- antibacterial wash
- fly repellent.

You should also consult a veterinary surgeon on first-aid procedures before leaving.

4.6.8 Horses should be vaccinated against tetanus at least every 5 years.

4.6.9 Annual vaccination against strangles is advisable, particularly in young horses.

4.6.10 A program to control internal parasites should be set up with the advice of a veterinary surgeon. To help control parasites:

- regularly monitor parasite status treat as necessary
- spell paddocks
- remove manure
- remove and hygienically dispose of bot fly eggs.

4.6.11 Horses' teeth must be checked, and filed if necessary, every 12 months.

4.6.12 Horses' legs should be inspected regularly for injuries or swellings.

4.6.13 Horses' hooves should be:

- shod if the horses are worked on roads or hard ground
- regularly trimmed or shod by a farrier (preferably every 6-8 weeks)
- regularly cleaned out.

4.6.14 Where treatment to restore health or repair injury is not possible, practical or successful, horses should be humanely destroyed.

Horses should be humanely destroyed by a veterinary surgeon; or if this is not possible, by a person experienced in these procedures. When horses are boarded, the owner should sign an authorisation for the animal to be euthanased in an emergency.

4.7 Transport

4.7.1 During transport horses should be:

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- penned separately, wherever possible
- fitted safely with headstalls (if the animals are trained to lead and tie up) with the lead of the headstall secured to the vehicle or stall using a quick release knot.

4.7.2 Lamé or sick horses should only be transported for veterinary treatment or slaughter where transport would not cause undue pain or distress.

4.7.3 Mares more than eight months pregnant should not be transported, if possible.

4.7.4 Any vehicle especially designed or regularly used for transporting horses should:

- protect horses from injury
- have non-slip floors
- provide easy access and operator safety
- protect horses against extremes of temperature
- have adequate ventilation
- be easy to clean
- be kept clean.

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