

## National Horse Organizations Endorse Welfare Code of Practice

**The American Horse Council aims to create a broad code for appropriate, humane use of horses.**

November 14, 2009

A national Welfare Code of Practice has been endorsed by the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Quarter Horse Association, the Kentucky Thoroughbred Association, the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, the U.S. Equestrian Federation and the U.S. Trotting Association. The Welfare Code of Practice, drafted by the American Horse Council, gives a general outline of the basic principles involved with responsible breeding, ownership and use of horses.

“We hope that as many organizations as possible will endorse it to show that the industry as a whole is committed to the welfare and safety of the horse,” said AHC President Jay Hickey. “We know that the safety and welfare of our horses is very important to us. We hope that this code will be another indication to others that the horse community takes its responsibilities to our horses very seriously.”

The AHC’s Welfare Code of Practice is not intended to replace or pre-empt those activities or any rules and regulations specific to a segment of the industry. Rather it is hoped that the endorsement of a broad, more generic Welfare Code of Practice by as many organizations as possible will be another indication to the public, the media, federal and state officials and the horse community that the horse industry “Puts the Horse First.”

“We fully support the AHC Welfare Code of Practice and encourage everyone associated with the horse to abide by its principles,” said Alex Waldrop, President and CEO of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association. “It is important that the horse industry as a whole, regardless of breed or discipline, affirms its individual and collective commitment to horse welfare and safety. It is equally important that the industry communicate with one voice on this important issue and the AHC is the right vehicle for doing so.”

“This Code of Practice stands to unite the equestrian community in its commitment to protect, honor, and ensure the safety and well-being of the horse which is the core of our sport,” noted John Long, CEO, United States Equestrian Federation, the National Governing Body of Equestrian Sport.

The AHC Welfare Code of Practice will also provide a guide for equine organizations that are formalizing a welfare philosophy and policy for their respective organizations. “The American Horse Council Welfare Code of Practice provides a standard for the horse industry and equine organizations to evaluate their individual welfare policies and initiatives. It clearly states the principles necessary to achieve a level of stewardship for the horse that always puts the welfare of the horse first,” said Dr. Jerry Black, past-President of the AAEP and Chair of the AHC’s Animal Welfare Committee.

The AHC Welfare Code of Practice follows.

American Horse Council Welfare Code of Practice

Introduction

American society has grown away from its agrarian roots of only a few generations ago. The horse, which was once a staple of American agriculture and general transportation, is now used primarily for breeding, competition, sport, recreation and entertainment, although there are still many horses used for work on farms and ranches, and in urban areas and exhibitions.

The horse industry is committed to the safety, health, care and welfare of all horses and to always “Put the Horse First.”

We address equine welfare and responsible care (1) by supporting a uniform Code of Practice regarding the responsible breeding, training, competing, care, use, enjoyment, health, transportation, and retirement of horses; and (2) by initiating communication with the public, the media, federal and state officials and within the horse community regarding these issues.

Our Commitment to all Horses and the Horse Industry

The organizations listed below are committed to the principle that the welfare and safety of the horse is the guiding principle in the decision-making process for all owners, service providers, organizations, events and activities.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to the dignity, humane care, health, safety and welfare of horses in all our activities and care. These are our highest priorities. We are the stewards of our horses and must be firm in the standards and practices that guide us. Our first principle is:

The welfare, safety and stewardship of the horse is the guiding principle in the decision-making process for all segments for the horse industry.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to promoting responsible breeding practices and to produce better horses, not just more horses.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to responsible training techniques. All training should be done with the maturation and ability of the horse considered. Horses should be prepared for competition with proper training and conditioning methods. Excessive disciplining methods, whether in stables, training areas, or during competition, will not be tolerated.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to educating owners, trainers, veterinarians, competitors, exhibitors and recreational riders to ensure that they know and respect their horse's abilities and limits, and their own, so as to not push the horse or themselves beyond their ability level.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to making all competitions fair and ensuring all competitors an equal opportunity to succeed. Performance-enhancing drugs, practices or equipment have no place in competitions or exhibitions. Effective drug testing by accredited laboratories is essential to the safety and welfare of our horses and the public support of competitions, with appropriate penalties levied for violations. The welfare of the horse must take precedence over the demands or expectations of owners, breeders, trainers, sellers, buyers, organizers, sponsors, officials, or spectators.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to the welfare of the horse as paramount during competition. The horse industry should invest in the infrastructure, environment and facilities to provide a safe environment for all horses in all activities, whether breeding, competing, or simply riding. Any facilities that house horses should be committed to the appropriate care and treatment of all horses while in their facility, and should be designed with the environment and the intended use of the horse in mind.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to minimizing injuries to horses during training, competition, use, or work. Whenever possible injury data should be collected, documented and reported to the governing body of the competition or any other injury database for analysis in order to ensure a safer environment.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to the continual review, evaluation and improvement of all rules, regulations, policies and practices in all equine activities, based on science (where indicated). When warranted, they should be refined or changed. This includes existing practices to ensure they are not being perceived as acceptable, particularly if new research has called them into question.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to providing continuing education on all activities involving horses and eliminate inhumane practices as well as strengthening sanctions for non-compliance.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to educating all people who own or work with horses to ensure they are knowledgeable in the proper husbandry, care, and handling of horses. Each horse should be observed frequently to ensure that they are healthy. In consultation with a veterinarian, all such individuals should develop a sound health care program, appropriate to the facilities, environment and needs of the horses.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to providing an environment in which anyone aware of equine cruelty or neglect is willing to report it to the proper local, state or federal authorities. Should an incident occur at an event it should be reported to judges, stewards, responsible authorities or the sanctioning organization.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to improving the health and welfare of horses through scientific research, collaboration, advocacy and the development of appropriate rules. The industry should continue to support and work with the many individuals, universities, veterinarians and foundations doing and funding equine health and welfare research in order to



reduce injuries and improve health.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to horse owners and caretakers ensuring horses in their care are current on vaccinations and following best practices to minimize infection and disease. When a disease outbreak occurs horse owners and events must act quickly and responsibly, monitor the horses, report the outbreak to, and cooperate with, veterinarians, authorities, facility management and all stakeholders to bring a rapid resolution to the outbreak.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to ensuring that our horses will have an opportunity to transition to additional careers, uses or activities as the need arises. When necessary, owners and veterinarians may have to consider end-of-life decisions. The welfare, safety and dignity of the horse must continue to be the guiding principle in deciding how and when to provide a humane death.

**WE ARE COMMITTED** to being transparent about our activities in order to ensure the public, the media, federal, state and local officials and the various segments of the horse community understand what we do, why we do it, and support it.