

Illinois Legislature to Vote on Double-Decker Horse Trailer Ban

Animal Welfare Intitute issues call to action.

April 5, 2008--Next week, HB 4162 will come to the Illinois House floor for a vote. The bill prohibits the transport of horses and other equidae on double-deck trailers in that state. (Some states already have laws outlawing double-deck trailers for equine transport; the mode of transportation is considered inhumane by animal welfare groups.)

As a result of the upcoming Illinois vote next week, the Animal Welfare Institute issued the following eAlert on April 3, calling on all concerned to take action:

In October 2007, a double-deck tractor trailer carrying 59 Belgian draft horses through Wadsworth, Ill., "blew through a stop light at Route 41 and Wadsworth Road and struck another vehicle," according to local police on the scene of the accident. The severe crash resulted in more than five hours of suffering for the horses before authorities could free them from the mangled truck. Sadly, nine animals died on the scene, with another six dying later on due to injuries sustained during the tragedy.

Accidents such as this one are not uncommon, since the two-tiered trailer is not designed to carry horses. Only a year earlier, a double-deck truck hauling 41 horses to slaughter at the Cavel International slaughterhouse in DeKalb, Ill., crashed as well (pictured), resulting in the deaths of 16 horses. Similar scenarios have occurred elsewhere in the United States.

Not only is it unsafe to haul horses in double-deck trailers, but it is inhumane--a point on which humane organizations, veterinary associations and even the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agree. According to the USDA:

"Double-deck trailers do not provide adequate headroom for equines, with the possible exception of foals and yearlings. We do not believe that trailers that have two or more permanent levels that are not collapsible can be adequately altered to accommodate adult equines, especially tall equines. A tall equine can be 8 feet tall to the top of its head when standing on all four legs and close to 12 feet tall when rearing.

We acknowledge that double-deck trailers can carry more equines and other livestock than single-deck trailers.... We do not believe that equines can be safely and humanely transported on a conveyance that has an animal cargo space divided into two or more stacked levels. (9 CFR Parts 70 and 88)."

Illinois has become a leader in protecting equines from abuse and neglect. Just last year, the Illinois General Assembly overwhelmingly passed legislation banning the slaughter of horses for human consumption. Sadly, although horses can no longer be slaughtered in the state, "killer buyers" continue to buy horses from across the United States as middlemen for the company.

The horses are then shipped to Mexico and Canada for slaughter, often passing through Illinois en route to Cavel's plant in Canada or plants in Mexico. For now, the preferred method of transporting horses to slaughter remains the double-deck truck.

What you can do:

A vote on HB 4162 is expected next week; please make calls in support of the HB 4162 Friday and Monday to your Representative's district office, and/or the capitol office on Tuesday. HB 4162 is a bi-partisan and widely supported measure. Be sure to mention the USDA quotes above and our facts listed below.

To find your legislator and their contact information, visit:

<http://www.ilga.gov/reports/rptMemberList.asp?gaid=9&ChamberId=H>. Because time is short, a quick phone call is the best means of expressing your support for this important legislation.

Facts:

*Double-deck trailers are designed for livestock such as cattle and hogs, not horses.

*The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has "reviewed limited data within the scientific literature that suggest increased rates of injury associated with the use of double-decked conveyances for transporting horses."

*Again, according to the AVMA "sources, such as the National Agriculture Safety Database and various manufacturers

producing trailers specifically for horse transport recommend heights of 7 to 8 ft as being necessary for the safe and comfortable transport of horses (i.e., adequate headroom for the horses to stand comfortably with their heads in normal position); it appears difficult, if not impossible, to meet such recommendations via the use of currently configured double-deck trailers, particularly for taller horses.”

*The US Department of Agriculture opposes the transport of horses on double-deck trailers and is currently in the process of prohibiting their use completely under the agency’s regulations governing the transport of equines to slaughter.

*Killer-buyers continue to use these trucks while passing through Illinois on their way to slaughterhouses in Canada and Mexico.

For the latest updates on this bill and AWI’s campaign against horse slaughter visit
http://www.awionline.org/legislation/horse_slaughter/whats_new.htm