



**EQUESTRIAN
CANADA
ÉQUESTRE**

HORSE WELFARE CODE OF CONDUCT

2025-05-30



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Definitions.....	3
Preamble & Purpose	3
Zero Tolerance Statement.....	4
Individual Responsibilities.....	4
Complaint Process	4
General Welfare	4
Examples of Abuse of Horses	5
Extreme Weather Conditions	7
Duty to Report.....	7
Categories of Rule Violations & Sanctions	7



Definitions

In this policy,

“Horse” is any equine under the care and control of an Individual subject to EC’s policies, as defined below and in EC’s [Discipline, Complaints and Appeals policy](#).

“Individual”- refers to a person that has a relationship with EC through employment, contract, volunteer position, official status, or the holding of a sport licence and/or coach status.

“Abuse” – refers to physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, hoarding, or other treatment of a Horse deemed cruel, harmful, distressful, or violent in nature.

“Distress” – refers to the state of being (a) in need of proper care, water, food or shelter (b) injured, sick, in pain or suffering or (c) abused or subject to undue physical or psychological hardship, privation or neglect.

“Learning Theory” – refers to how horses learn and respond to training.

“Companionship with other Horses” – refers to providing either temporary or permanent social benefits of belonging to a herd, to the minimum level of allowing visual contact with other Horses.

Preamble & Purpose

1. Equestrian Canada (EC) is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive environment for all participants that is free from Abuse. The purpose of this Policy is to stress the importance of that commitment by educating Individuals and the public about Horse Abuse, outlining how EC will work to prevent Horse Abuse, and how such Abuse or suspected Abuse can be reported to and addressed by EC.
2. EC requires that all Individuals adhere to this Code of Conduct and acknowledge and accept that the welfare of the Horse must always be paramount and must never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences.
3. EC is committed to:
 - a) recognizing Horses as sentient beings, defined by the ability to feel, perceive or experience subjectively. (ie. the animal is not only capable of feeling pain and distress but also can have positive psychological experiences, such as comfort, pleasure or interest that are appropriate to its species, environment and circumstances). To state that animals are sentient accepts that they can experience positive and negative emotions.¹
 - b) upholding the welfare of the Horse, regardless of value and performance level, as the primary priority regardless of competitive commitments, expectations, or commercial influences;
 - c) requiring the Horse be treated with the highest level of care, compassion, respect, and empathy;

¹ <https://nzva.org.nz/positions-advocacy/position-statements/sentence/#:~:text=The%20NZVA%20believes%20that%20'sentience,feel%2C%20perceive%20or%20experience%20subjectively.>



- d) requiring that no Horse be subjected to Abuse (ref: Rules of Equestrian Canada, Section A General Regulations, Article A517) or Distress;
- e) ensuring that all Individuals accept and implement, at a minimum, the requirements within the National Farm Animal Care Council Equine Code of Practice;
- f) ongoing support for scientific studies of animal-based indicators of pain, Distress, and/or compromised welfare;
- g) increasing education and awareness for the evolution of best management and equine husbandry practices;
- h) requiring Individuals to know and follow the EC Rules and implement industry regulations in all competitions; and
- i) reviewing, revising, and developing competition rules and regulations that protect the welfare of the Horse.

Zero Tolerance Statement

4. EC has zero tolerance for Abuse of a Horse. All Individuals have a duty to report instances of Horse Abuse or suspected Horse Abuse to EC which shall immediately address such reports as needed under the terms of the applicable policies.

Individual Responsibilities

5. All Individuals who are bound by EC's policies as defined in EC's [Discipline, Complaints and Appeals policy](#), in addition to their obligations under EC's Code of Conduct and Ethics, have additional duties pursuant to this Horse Welfare Code of Conduct.
6. All Individuals must refrain from Abuse as defined below in this Horse Welfare Code of Conduct, which includes but is not limited to Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Neglect, Hoarding, and Animal Sexual Abuse.

Complaint Process

7. The process for complaints alleging of Abuse of a Horse shall be that set out in EC's [Discipline, Complaints and Appeals policy](#).

General Welfare

8. All Horses must be cared for in accordance with the [Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines](#).
9. The standard by which conduct or treatment will be measured is that which a reasonable person, informed and experienced in generally accepted equine practices, would determine to be cruel, abusive or inhumane².

² <https://standardbred.org/about/welfare-policy/>



Examples of Abuse of Horses

10. “Physical Abuse” – refers to the infliction of injuries or causing pain and/or suffering. This Abuse may be caused by hitting, kicking, throwing, beating, whipping, spurring, shaking, poisoning, burning, scalding, suffocation, etc.

Examples of Physical Abuse include but are not limited to:

- a) nosebands used in such a way that they interfere with a Horse’s breathing, or be tight enough to cause pain or discomfort;
- b) excessively whipping or beating a Horse;
 - i. forward of the Horse's shoulder or in the vicinity of their head;
 - ii. using an action that raises the arm above rider’s shoulder height;
 - iii. when the horse is showing no response;
 - iv. causing injury to the Horse;
- c) subjecting a Horse to any kind of tack or equipment electric shock device; during training or handling;
- d) excessively or persistently using spurs, identified by, but not limited to, the presence of spur marks and/or blood, or jabbing a Horse in the mouth with the bit, identified by, but not limited to, purple tongue or blood;
- e) riding/driving an obviously exhausted, lame or injured Horse;
- f) rapping a Horse (poling or rapping is the practice of hitting a horse on the legs as they go over a jump, to make them think they hit the fence);
- g) hyper-sensitizing any part of a Horse;
- h) physical desensitization that impairs nerve function required for normal function and behaviour, including, but not limited to, tail blocking and/or limb blocking to hide pain and lameness;
- i) using shackles or chains (not to be confused with rubber or elastic exercising devices);
- j) lunging/riding/driving a Horse with raw or bleeding sores, wounds or abrasions;
- k) using an explosive (i.e. firecracker, fire extinguisher except in the case of fire) or using fire such as lighters, matches, etc.;
- l) tying a Horse with their head in an unnatural position;
- m) use of a vehicle to exercise/drag a Horse while attached to motorized or powered vehicle;
- n) ignoring or intentionally seeking out adverse medication, drug and/or substance reactions that compromise the Horse’s welfare (including but not limited to staggering and falling down);
- o) excess of use, also known as overuse, in activity, lesson, training, or competition to which physical or emotional impacts are demonstrated, Overuse in Horses may be defined by calendar year, competition period, month, week, competition or by day. A Horse is considered to be in a situation of overuse when there is a noticeably observable decline in performance, physical capabilities, movement and/or mental well-being. These declines may be combined with physical signs of discomfort, exhaustion, lameness, stride length, resistance to move forward, use of both leads, decline in jumping style. The above is not an exhaustive list of symptoms or combinations thereof and it is imperative that an official use their horsemanship skills and equine knowledge to make an informed, non-bias decision when determining whether a Horse or pony is being abused through overuse, when being observed in the show rings or elsewhere on the competition grounds.



11. “Emotional Abuse” – refers to psychological distress, persistent threatening behavior, failure to provide basic needs, bullying, excessive teasing, exploitation, or coercion that leads to a fragile, or otherwise compromised, emotional state.

Examples of Emotional Abuse include but are not limited to:

- a) on-going isolation that results in emotional or psychological Distress;
- b) training practices that go against the principles of learning theory and are either mentally or physically inadequate for a Horse’s natural capabilities, comprehension, learning capabilities and physical abilities;
- c) failing to intervene or diffuse a Horse displaying mental/emotional distress including:
 - i. excessive stereotypic behavior that is causing harm to the Horse (such as crib biting, wood chewing, pawing/kicking, weaving, fence-pacing, stall-walking, or flank biting);
 - ii. conflict behaviours (bucking, rearing, spinning, bolting, kicking out);
 - iii. aggression towards humans.

12. Neglect

- a. Neglect refers to the omission of adequate care and attention and is evaluated with consideration given to the Horse’s needs and requirements.
- a) Examples of Neglect include without limitation:
 - i. not allowing the Horse adequate recovery time and/or treatment for an injury;
 - i. not ensuring appropriate supervision of the Horse during travel, training or competition;
 - ii. failing to safely and securely contain a Horse while at the event location;
 - ii. not considering the welfare of the Horse when administering medication;
 - iii. disregarding the use of performance-enhancing drugs;
 - iv. failure to ensure safety of equipment or environment;
 - v. leaving a Horse without adequate food, forage, water, and opportunities for free movement and companionship with other Horses;
 - vi. failure to provide veterinary care, grooming, or sanitation resulting in poor physical and/or mental conditions.
- b. Neglect is determined by the behaviour viewed objectively, not whether harm is intended or results from the behaviour.

13. Hoarding: Horse neglect on a large scale involving multiple numbers of Horses that an owner or caretaker is not equipped to care for, financially, physically, mentally or otherwise. Hoarding frequently results in inadequate housing and husbandry conditions, among other forms of neglect.

14. Animal sexual abuse: Any abusive act between a Horse and a human involving the rectum, anus, or genitalia; or sexual contact with animals which may or may not result in physical injury to the animal.

This list and set of examples are not intended to be exhaustive.



Extreme Weather Conditions

- 15. Competitors and competition organizers must observe the Equestrian Canada guidelines provided for extreme weather conditions, including temperature, and poor air quality during competition (attached links).

Duty to Report

- 16. Anyone who witnesses or has reasonable grounds to believe that a Horse is suffering or has suffered Abuse, Neglect and/or Distress, is obligated to report it.. A person should not rely on anyone else to report on their behalf nor delegate the reporting. Anyone providing information to others should be encouraged to report their concerns themselves as their duty to report.
- 17. It is a violation for any Individual who knew or ought to have known of a potential violation of this Horse Welfare Code of Conduct toward the Horse to fail to report such conduct.
- 18. The person making the report does not need to determine whether a violation took place: instead, the responsibility lies in reporting the objective behaviour.
- 19. In determining whether to report the Abuse to EC, local animal welfare enforcement, or law enforcement, the person should use as much information as they have available to them about the Horse, or the person(s) involved. Reports of Abuse involving Individuals or Horses as defined in this policy should be reported to EC. Other reports should be directed to animal welfare or law enforcement.
- 20. The duty to report is ongoing and is not satisfied simply by making an initial report. The duty to report includes reporting, on a timely basis, any and all relevant information of which an Individual becomes aware.
- 21. It is a violation of this Horse Welfare Code of Conduct to retaliate against any reporter under this section.

Categories of Rule Violations & Sanctions

- 22. In addition to EC’s Discipline, Complaints & Appeals policy, Sanctions (56-60), the following sanctions shall be ordered for the violations indicated:

Infraction	Policy	Fine	Suspension
23. Excessive use of whip or spurs or tongue straps and improper use of bits *	Horse Welfare Code of Conduct	First Offense: up to \$6,000.00 Second Offense: up to \$12,000.00 Third Offense: up to \$24,000.00	First Offense: up to 6 months Second Offense: up to 12 months Third Offense: up to 24 months



Infraction	Policy	Fine	Suspension
24. Use of illegal equipment** capable of causing harm or pain (Abuse) to a Horse *	Horse Welfare Code of Conduct	First Offense: up to \$12,000.00 Second Offense: up to \$18,000.00 Third Offense: up to \$36,000.00	First Offense: up to 12 months Second Offense: up to 18 months Third Offense **: up to 36 months
25. Abuse as defined in this Code and violations of the 12-hour injection rule involving forbidden substances for purpose of competition *	Horse Welfare Code of Conduct	First Offense: up to \$12,000.00 Second Offense: up to \$24,000.00 Third Offense: up to \$60,000.00	First Offense: up to 12 months Second Offense: up to 24 months Third Offense: up to 60 months **
26. Unintentional Death or Maiming *	Horse Welfare Code of Conduct	First Offense: up to \$36,000.00 Second Offense: up to \$60,000.00 Third Offense: up to \$100,000.00	First Offense: up to 36 months ** Second Offense: up to 60 months ** Third Offense: Lifetime ban
27. Intentional Death or Maiming for financial or other means *	Horse Welfare Code of Conduct	\$100,000.00	Lifetime ban
<p>* If there are multiple Horses involved, the penalty should apply to each Horse and run consecutively.</p> <p>** Illegal equipment are modifications to tack/equipment to cause intentional pain or injury with the objective of punishment or to enhance performance as well as any equipment or accessories that admit or cause electric shock.</p>			



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