

Federal Oversight

USDA employs its own inspectors to attend horse events and conduct unannounced inspections to oversee the DQPs' work. We evaluate their inspection procedures, observe horses during events, and may also examine horses for signs of soring. USDA inspectors also attend events that do not retain DQPs to check for compliance with the Horse Protection Act.



For More Information

To learn more about the HPA, or if you suspect soring and want to submit a complaint, go to: www.aphis.usda.gov/hpa.

You can also contact:
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Program Aid No. 1827 | Issued June 2013 | Revised April 2024
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The Horse Protection Act



The Horse Protection Act makes it unlawful for any person to show, exhibit, sell, or transport sore horses—or to use prohibited equipment or substances in these activities. Under this Federal law, the managers of these events must make sure sore horses do not participate. People who violate the Horse Protection Act may be subject to criminal or civil charges.



Soring

What Is Soring?

Soring refers to the application of certain substances or devices to a horse's legs to cause physical pain or lameness when walking. There are many ways to make a horse sore, including irritating or blistering a horse's forelegs by applying caustic chemicals, using painful devices, inflicting cuts or burns, improperly trimming hooves to expose sensitive parts of the foot, or using pressure shoeing techniques. When a horse that has been abused in this way steps on the ground, it responds by quickly lifting its front legs to relieve the pain.

Horses such as Tennessee Walking Horses are known for having a naturally smooth, high-stepping gait. Some individuals will sore their horses to get the horse to step higher and/or faster. In addition to being painful and illegal, people who use soring to accentuate their horse's gait have an unfair advantage and damage the integrity of the breed and industry.

Monitoring for Soring

Most event managers hire Designated Qualified Persons (DQPs) to monitor for sore horses at their events and help make sure they do not participate. DQPs are typically farriers, trainers, or other individuals with extensive knowledge of horses. They also must be licensed by a USDA-certified horse industry organization and meet Horse Protection Act standards.

DQPs physically inspect every Tennessee Walking Horse and racking horse before they can take part in the event. DQPs evaluate a horse's movements and appearance. They also physically inspect its forelegs, looking for abnormal tissue, inflammation, pain, abrasions, blood, and prohibited equipment and substances. "Lastly, they re-inspect every Tennessee Walking and racking horse tied first in their class or event.

DQPs must report any horse that is sore or otherwise noncompliant with the Horse Protection Act or regulations to event managers. Event managers are legally responsible for disqualifying sore horses.

USDA has two goals in administering the Horse Protection Act:

- Eliminate the cruel and inhumane practice of soring
- Promote fair competition

Did You Know?

USDA inspectors may use diagnostic technology—such as digital radiographs, ultrasound, iris scanning, and swabbing for prohibited substances—during their exams to help identify sore horses.

