

IFHA Principles of Good Practice - Emergency Euthanasia of Horses on a Racecourse

Preamble

1. Catastrophic injuries or accidents occasionally occur which necessitate the euthanasia of a horse on the racecourse during racing or training. A horse should not have to endure chronic pain and suffering, or be subjected to continuous analgesia, or a life of individual confinement when the prospects for recovery and a future good quality of life are limited.

Decisions to euthanise are often complex and highly distressing requiring the balancing of economic, health, safety and welfare factors with the likelihood of recovery and future quality of life.

Policies and Procedures

2. Given the emotive and often misunderstood aspects of euthanasia, it is imperative that all racing authorities immediately implement policies and procedures which at a minimum reflect the following:
 - a. Unless the nature of the injury and/or condition of the horse reasonably necessitates more urgent and immediate action, injured horses should be humanely and expeditiously transported from the race track to a secluded area for thorough clinical assessment.
 - b. The racing authority should ensure that there are clear lines of responsibility allowing the Veterinarian appointed by the racecourse or racing authority present at the incident to make any necessary decision for immediate euthanasia. Whenever practicable, clinical assessment and planning of future actions should occur in collaboration with the owner and the attending veterinarian(s) observing appropriate confidentiality and ensuring recordkeeping.
 - c. Acceptable methods of euthanasia recognise cultural differences among nations and may include appropriate chemical methods, or where considered acceptable the humane use of firearms, all administered by trained and competent personnel.
 - d. Euthanasia should be shielded from the view of the public and performed in an area of seclusion as is reasonably possible or using temporarily erected screening.
 - e. Euthanasia should produce immediate relief from pain and suffering, and performed in such a manner to eliminate and/or minimise any indignities possibly arising from the process itself and/or the removal of the euthanised horse to other locations.

Personnel

3. To effect these general principles into policies and procedures, all racing authorities should ensure an adequate complement of trained, rehearsed and licenced or approved personnel are available at all times when horses are present on the racing and/or training surfaces. There should be clear lines of command and control for any incident and procedures in place for any communication with the public or media.