



Promoting
Responsible
Thoroughbred
Ownership

This document has been prepared to give guidance to horse owners on the care of the horse and options available to prevent horses becoming unwanted or neglected. These options primarily include alternative uses and retirement. They also include inevitable end-of-life decisions, including euthanasia, humane destruction and disposal.



Ireland has an international reputation for the production of high quality horses and for excellent horsemanship. This reputation has been built on a long legacy of quality care and husbandry.

CARE OF THE HORSE

Responsible horse ownership, horse breeding and every other horse related activity require a clear knowledge and understanding of the owner's responsibilities both legally and in terms of the care, cost implications, demands on time, usage and limitations of use, legislation and ultimately disposal of the horse. Every owner has an individual responsibility in this context.

Many of our horses are highly prized and valuable. However, the increased horse production of recent years is tempered by the realities of a very different national and global financial climate.

This means that every horse owner has to consider all the options available for their horse, to prevent it becoming unwanted or falling into a state of neglect or suffering. Horse owners must be mindful that there is a legal requirement to have an identification document (passport) for each horse they possess, and that this should accompany the animal on journeys, when sold and during the disposal process.

Best practice standards of care are available from the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council, Animal Health & Welfare Division, Agriculture House, Kildare St., Dublin 2. The relevant document is available at



www.agriculture.gov.ie/fawac. Legal obligations are under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and Amendment 1965 in addition to other legislation relevant to the individual type of horse. There is a new Animal Health and Welfare Bill being drafted at the moment which will update and consolidate existing legislation.

ALTERNATIVE USES

Horses are best kept in an active and stimulating environment which will fulfil their needs according to their state of health and wellbeing. Owners can seek to place their horses in alternative use and career programmes, which can include retraining or donation to therapeutic riding programmes.

Horse owners have to be realistic, since not all horses are suitable for these programmes and opportunities for placement within them is limited. A retraining service and advice on retraining options are available from The Irish Horse Welfare Trust (www.ihwt.ie).



RETIREMENT

Retirement requires that adequate long term provision is made to ensure that the horse cannot fall into a state of neglect. Those who cannot provide retirement facilities themselves can consider paying others to provide this service for them. Responsible retirement can be achieved by adhering to the concept of the “five freedoms” to which every horse is entitled and which horse owners are obliged to provide:

1. **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst** - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
2. **Freedom from Discomfort** - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. **Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease** - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. **Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour** - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. **Freedom from Fear and Distress** - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Retirement without ensuring that these principles can be provided and adhered to for the rest of the horse's life is irresponsible, potentially cruel and can lead to prosecution.

If you think you have seen an animal being abused or neglected please contact the ISPCA **National Cruelty Help Line** on **1890 515 515**.

EUTHANASIA, HUMANE DESTRUCTION / SLAUGHTER & DISPOSAL

Euthanasia to prevent suffering is a well established principle in every sector of animal care. The veterinary profession provides this highly skilled and humane service where horses are kept. Disposal of the remains / carcass is then the responsibility of the horse owner. Burial is no longer an option due to restrictions imposed by environmental laws (European Communities Animal By-Products Regulations 2003).



Humane destruction is also available through horse slaughter facilities, which are licensed and supervised by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. These facilities dispose of horse remains / carcasses in accord with EU and national legislation.

Horses with passports stamped 'Not For Human Consumption' or where signed by the owner or keeper on the appropriate passport page as 'Not Intended For Slaughter For Human Consumption', may not enter the human food chain.

Humane destruction and carcass disposal is also available through the knacker service.

A list of Ireland's knackeries and horse slaughter facilities is available from the Department of Agriculture at www.agriculture.gov.ie/schemes/fallenanimalscheme.doc

SUMMARY

If you own or keep a horse you are morally and legally responsible for its health, safety and welfare while it is in your ownership/possession.

Published February 2009

SUPPORTING BODIES

