



WELFARE OF THE HORSE IN THE 21ST CENTURY:

Meeting the Needs of the Performance Horse in Our Changing Environment

Since its inception in 1917, USEF has been dedicated to pursuing excellence and promoting growth in equestrian sport, all while providing and maintaining a safe and level playing field for both equine and human athletes.

Modern equestrian competition occurs in a dynamic environment where advancements in nutritional science, equipment innovation, and sports medicine contribute to higher-level and more intense competition.

In recent years, horse sports have experienced increased public scrutiny to both therapeutic techniques and medication practices in racing. More recently, this focus has raised a number of questions about treatment of horses in the show arena. The Federation's Drugs & Medications Program is underpinned by a belief that restorative therapies are appropriate for horses in competition and this philosophy will continue to guide the program.

A review of the issues contributing to the changing landscape of the equestrian competitive environment points to specific areas where the USEF has an opportunity to evaluate and improve the conditions of USEF Licensed Competitions.

I. Creation of Over-Arching - Catastrophic Incident Protocols

The need to consolidate the flow of information from the competition venues to the Federation is important. Improvements to current reporting processes are called for as well as clear communication procedures within the Federation.

Current process and protocol regarding the management of potential catastrophic incidents at USEF Licensed competitions is distributed throughout several departments in the Federation. Certain responsibility and communication processes following an incident might occur in the Sport Program Departments, while others flow through the Safety Committee and Competitions Department or are reported through the Licensed Officials Department. Other incidents however (e.g. a member filing a protest) rely on regulatory processes to relay information about what is occurring in the field.

A. “Collapse Rule”

[Proposed Rule Change attached]

1. Informs USEF of collapses
2. Empowers USEF to investigate the circumstances
3. Holds the owner and trainer accountable for refusal to cooperate

B. “Necropsy” Rule

[Rule Change Proposal being developed for review by Committees]

1. USEF may mandate a necropsy.
2. USEF would have access to necropsy report.

C. Sport Integrity Unit

[Best practices review – industry evaluations underway by Executive & Legal]

1. Enable USEF to launch and investigation of certain reported incidents.
2. Engage an independent investigative agent as needed.
3. Provide an improved resource for members to report issues of abuse in the sport.

D. National Equine Health Plan

[Currently underway with American Horse Council and industry leaders]

1. Recent EHV-1 outbreaks point to the need for a national reporting system for dissemination of consistent and reliable information.
2. Distribution and management of appropriate Bio-Security requirements and standards.

E. USEF Accident Report Protocol

[Process will follow development and implementation initiatives listed above]

1. Update current Accident Report Process.
2. Implementation of new Protocols.

II. Introduction of a New Category of Rules - Prohibited Practices

The Federation's rules have, over time, been primarily focused upon detection of prohibited substances and have provided guidelines for the administration of permitted therapeutic medications for competition horses. The concept of legislating prohibited practices was introduced in the 1970s by the USDA in the Horse Protection Act and was focused primarily upon soring techniques which are prevalent in certain segments of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry.

Today's advances in medicine, cutting-edge therapies, and nutritional science afford practitioners and equestrians alike with numerous opportunities to aid and assist the equine athlete in the competition environment. However, medical science when taken to an extreme which counters its benefit to the health and well-being of horses. With a view to the landscape of these advancements coupled with analysis of the current equestrian competition environment, there is a need to evolve "best practices" for owners, trainers, and treating veterinarians regarding the use of new techniques in sports medicine such as shock wave therapy and the judicious and beneficial use of intra-articular medications in sport horses. Additionally, training and preparation techniques which have been deemed as inappropriate and potentially harmful to performance horses have been identified and are currently under review at the committee level.

A. "12 Hour Injection Rule"

[Proposed Rule Change Attached]

B. Parameters of Permitted Shock Wave Therapy Treatment

[Proposed Rule Change being developed for Review by Committees]

C. Development of Treatment Regimens for the Use of IA Corticosteroids

[Under Veterinary and D&M Committee Review]

D. Review of Surgical or Chemical Alteration of Tail Carriage

E. Review of Shoeing Practices

[Topic of Discussion in several Breed & Discipline Technical Committees]

F. Review of Training and Preparation Practices (which include but are not limited to excessive lunging, biting, and over-flexion)

[On the Agenda of Breed & Discipline Technical Committees]

G. Review of the Competition Culture

1. Judges' Criteria and Class Specifications

2. Over-Competing Horses

3. Review of qualification requirements and "point chasing"

III. Responsibility for Performance Horses in the Sport

The Role of the Owner – Trainer – Rider – Treating Veterinarian

Equestrian competitors, leisure riders, coaches, fans, and enthusiasts each share a personal bond with the horse. This commonality defines the membership of the Federation and guides an unwavering dedication to promote the safety and welfare of both equine and human athletes in equestrian sport. A fair and even playing field is tantamount to this core mission. It is incumbent upon the Federation to take a lead in regulatory and educational initiatives which further this mission.

Current Considerations Include the Following Concepts:

A. Regulatory Reform Resulting in Greater Accountability

1. Require Federation membership for treating veterinarians.
2. Redefine Person(s) Responsible – Broaden Scope to Include Trainer, Rider, Coach, Owner, and Veterinarian
3. Suspend the horse/pony subject of the violation.
4. Report activities to State and Federal Regulatory Agencies.
5. Increase in penalties from the Hearing Committee for violations

B. Modify and Intensify Drug & Medications Testing to include:

1. Targeted Testing
2. Focused Testing – includes mandatory testing of top placing
3. Increased Testing – random horses in number of competitions
4. Questionable behavior

C. Create Additional Programs and Guides that Promote Safety and Welfare in the Sport

1. Educational materials regarding appropriate therapeutic treatment of performance horses.
2. Enhance communication and transparency in the owner – trainer- veterinarian relationships.
3. Develop tools to better manage and document treatment records of horses in competition.