



For immediate release
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Alberta livestock industry champions proper horse care

Calgary, AB: Ensuring more than 300,000 horses in Alberta are cared for properly is the focus of a new educational initiative spearheaded by Alberta's livestock industry.

"The vast majority of horse owners practice responsible care of their animals, but there are a small number of owners who clearly need to do a better job," says Susan Church of Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC), a partnership representing Alberta's major livestock groups. "Horse neglect or improper animal care of any kind is simply unacceptable and does not meet the standards held by Alberta livestock producers and their industry."

Complaints about improper horse care have for years been the number one founded complaint received by the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Alberta SPCA). The new educational initiative is a collaborative effort between AFAC, Alberta SPCA and Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development (AAFRD), designed to educate horse owners, clarify horse welfare standards and advocate for better enforcement tools for those standards. These goals stem from the need to reduce the number of founded horse neglect cases in Alberta.

"Proper horse care is a requirement for every horse owner," says Les Burwash of AAFRD's Forage and Horse Branch. "It is incumbent on all horse owners to understand and follow proper care standards, and uninformed owners to educate themselves through the many resources available."

Horse-related founded complaints to Alberta SPCA have been increasing. These complaints spread among both large and small rural areas and acreages, says Morris Airey, Director of Enforcement, Alberta SPCA. "The most common founded complaints are cases where horses are not provided with proper food, water or shelter. These instances are disturbing at any time but particularly so during the winter, when the damaging effects of this mismanagement are greater and most likely to result in severe distress."

To meet feeding requirements, horse owners should ensure that good quality hay or forage is well supplied at all times, says Burwash. In addition, horse owners should regularly assess the body condition of each horse as an indicator horse is getting adequate nutrition. "Horses are individuals and should be managed and fed as individuals."

A water source should be available at all times, says Burwash. Common founded complaints are the result of owners who count on snow as a sole source of water in winter – a practice that is inadequate and unacceptable. "Every horse must have access to a sufficient supply of potable water to meet its individual maintenance and activity needs. A horse simply cannot consume enough snow alone to meet those needs."

Shelter needs vary depending on weather, environment and the horse's body condition, he adds, but having adequate shelter available at all times with room for all animals is the best way to ensure proper care. Regular assessment of body condition is essential, paying particular attention to older animals and very young animals to catch emerging problems.

The ongoing challenge is the very few horse owners who appear to blatantly neglect proper horse care, says Susan Church. She encourages rural and acreage area residents to continue to report any cases of improper horse care to Alberta SPCA, 1-800-455-9003 or AFAC's ALERT line 1-800-506-2273.

The Executive Summary of the AFAC-commissioned report, Horse Welfare in Alberta, is available on the AFAC Web site, www.afac.ab.ca. Horse owners can access information on proper horse care in the horse section of the AAFRD "Ropin' the Web" Web site. (To access, go to www.agric.gov.ab.ca, and in the left side column click on "livestock," then click on "horse.") They can also get information directly from AAFRD's horse and forage office: (403) 948-8541.

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