



Survey of awareness, implementation and compliance to the Code of Practice in the Canadian equine industry

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Equine Code Follow-up Survey Summary

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This Horse Welfare Alliance of Canada (HWAC) led project is to gauge awareness, implementation and compliance to the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines* (the Equine Code). The Codes serve as our national understanding of animal care Requirements and Recommended Practices. This project began with a survey that ran from 15 MAR 2017 to 31 OCT 2017 and received 2,800 responses. Results of this initial survey showed need for a **follow-up survey** to further assess respondent's compliance with the Requirements in the Code.

The **follow-up survey** opened 27 NOV 2017 and closed 20 DEC 2017. The survey information was sent to 207 people from the initial survey who indicated they were aware of the Equine Code and interested and willing to participate and provide further detail. We received responses from 61 (30%) of those invited to participate.

It may be noted that those people who responded to the follow-up survey should not be considered an accurate reflection of the Canadian equine industry in regards to awareness, implementation or compliance to the Code. They may be early adopters who understand the importance of animal welfare and are looking for resources to assure their animal's welfare needs are being met. Notwithstanding, these individuals are assisting in further identifying areas of need for education and awareness in respect to the care of equine in Canada.

The following is a breakdown of the responses to the twelve survey questions.

Question 1: How did you determine you were in compliance or noncompliance to the Requirements within the Equine Code?

When determining compliance or noncompliance the majority (84%) of the respondents indicated they compare their practices against the Requirements with the Equine Code. Twenty-one percent (21%) of the people felt they were in compliance because they were following tradition and caring for their animals like they were taught and from experience.

Q2: Please describe what "compliance" to the Requirements means to you.

The majority of the respondents described "compliance" as meeting or exceeding the Requirements in the Equine Code. Some noted that the Requirements were satisfactory but minimal, all horse owners and caregivers should be meeting these minimum standards.

Q3: If you indicated you were not in compliance to some or all of the Requirements, please tell us why?

Twelve people indicated they were not in compliance with some or all the Requirements. Of these, the majority indicated they are unable to meet the Requirements (i.e. financial restrictions), while others indicated they were currently in the process of meeting the Requirements. A small percentage indicated they do not agree with the Requirements or they felt not enough information is provided in the Code on how to meet Requirements.

One of the challenges that this question highlighted was in regards to owners who board their horses. They were unsure or not able to influence how the stable owners manage the application of fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides and manure management. "I assume that the property owners follow these practices, but cannot be 100% confident."

Q4: How often do you refer to the Equine Code?

The majority of respondents indicated they refer to the Code on an "as needed" basis for advice and recommendations. Some respondents use the Code as an educational tool, especially with new or novice horse owners or when they are concerned respecting the care of a horse(s). There is indication the Code is used as an educational tool to assist in answering questions on care of equines.

The following six survey questions look at specific Requirements within the Equine Code.

Q5: Considering the Equine Code Requirements in Section 2.1 Pastures and Yards as stated below:

- **At a minimum, each horse must have enough space to move easily, walk forward, turn around with ease and lie down in a normal resting posture. There must also be sufficient space for subordinate horses to escape aggression.**
- **In muddy conditions horses must, at a minimum, have access to a mud-free, well-drained area in the pasture/yard on which to stand and lie down.**
- **The application of fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and farm manure must be timed to prevent any health risks to grazing horses or contamination of ground water.**

Seventy-five (75%) of the participants who responded to this question indicated they believe they practice good pasture management as described in the Equine Code (e.g. pasture rotation, weed control, stocking density). Twenty-six (26%) of the respondents indicated their horse is located at a stable and that they are satisfied with pastures, yard and related management issues. A small percentage (2%) have horses at a stable and are not aware of pasture, yard and / or other management issues.

Q6: Considering the Requirements in Section 2.4 Safety and Emergencies as stated below:

- **Develop an emergency action plan for emergencies that may occur in your area.**
- **Toxic materials must be securely stored such that horses cannot gain access to them.**

The majority of respondents felt they are in compliance with this section of the Code. Additional comments indicated a need for improved communication between horse owners and stable personnel regarding safety and emergency plans at a stable. Some respondents also indicated that the development or review of existing emergency preparedness has been brought to the forefront following the wildfires that occurred this past summer in Western Canada.

Q7: Considering Requirements in Section 3.4 Nutritional Content and Feed Management as stated below:

- **Horses must receive a diet that is adequate for maintaining health and vigour.**
- **The daily ration must address the horse's maintenance and activity needs and other factors relevant to individual horses and the environment.**
- **Horses must have access to salt either provided in the ration or free access (a block or loose salt).**

The majority of respondents determine compliance to this Requirement by Body Condition Scoring, weight tape assessment and / or working with a veterinarian or nutritionist. It was noted that there is a need to recognize variances when it comes to determining compliance for nutritional content and feed management including weather, stage of production, physical activity, age and body condition.

Q8: Considering Requirements in Section 6.4 Methods of Identification as stated below

- **Animal identification must be performed in a manner that causes the minimum of handling stress and pain, regardless of the method used.**
- **If branding is necessary, do not brand horses on the jaw/cheek.**
- **When registering new brands, select an approved site other than the jaw/cheek. Consult the appropriate provincial regulatory authorities, breed registry or sport council for more information.**
- **Horses must never be branded when they are wet.**

Over half of the respondents indicated their horse does not have added identifiers (ie. brand, microchip, tattoo). Those that had identifiers, indicated they choose the least painful application method and ensure that it is applied by a skilled or professional person. Some respondents who did not have added identifiers indicated that they used methods such as photos, natural markings (i.e. color, whorls) and DNA.

Q9: Considering Requirements in Section 6.7 Hoof Care as stated below

- **Hooves must be trimmed and/or shod as often as is necessary to maintain hooves in functional condition. Whether shod or unshod, hooves must not be allowed to grow to excessive lengths causing injury or discomfort to the horse.**

The majority of respondents ensure the farrier or other personnel are skilled and use recognized techniques. Most exercise (82%) diligence researching qualifications / experience of farriers, ask for references and continuing education practices. Sixty-six percent (66%) clean hooves regularly, though "regularly" is not defined. Recognition of variances in hoof care (i.e. use of animal, age and hoof type) was an area that respondents felt needed expanded on within the Codes.

Q10: Considering Requirements in Section 10.1 Timelines for Euthanasia as stated below

- **Equines that are sick, injured, or in pain must receive appropriate treatment without delay or be euthanized without delay.**
- **For sick, injured or compromised horses that are not showing improvement, horse owners or caregivers must, without delay, obtain veterinary advice on appropriate care and treatment or make arrangements for euthanasia.**

Survey results indicated that euthanasia is an area where more education is needed, especially in the areas of timeliness and available methods. The majority of respondents (90%) indicate they understand that when euthanasia is deemed necessary, it must be performed without delay, particularly in the case of a severe, traumatic injury so as to prevent suffering.

Troubling was the fact that only 84% indicated they recognize that *they* are responsible for euthanasia (end of life) decisions respecting their horse. This may have been expected to be 100%. Over 60% of the respondents indicated they do consult a veterinarian to develop plans for equine euthanasia (end of life options).

The survey also identified that there appears to be a communication gap between horse owners and boarding stable managers on what is to happen if a horse requires emergency euthanasia while in the care of the boarding stable.

Q11: Please provide comments and examples of challenges and / or concerns that you have or can identify with the current Equine Code.

The comments reiterated the challenge of Equine Code awareness within the equine industry. How do we get the Codes into the hands of ALL horse owners, including those who are not members of equine organizations or associations?

Boarding stables and rescue facilities were identified as high-risk areas. Respondents indicated that they did not believe that these sectors of the equine industry had a high level of awareness of the Code or the value of the information contained within the Code.

Vagueness of wording within the Requirements was a common comment amongst participants. The ability to measure compliance was also noted as challenging due to the vagueness of wording, variance in Requirements based on use, age, etc., ability to quantify theory and resource based requirements and staying current to what is considered compliant.

Lack of educational programming on specific aspects of the Code including regulatory requirements (i.e. deadstock removal).

Awareness and access to reporting options for each province respecting suspected cases of neglect and abuse.

Q12: Do you feel the Equine Code provides information necessary to meet the health and welfare needs of your horse(s)?

The majority (84%) of the respondents indicate they feel the Equine Code provides the information necessary to meet the health and welfare need of their horse. "Information in the Code is very sound and informative."

Respondents commented that not all equine owners are aware of the Code. In many instances, traditions play a big factor in how equines are raised and cared for.

Overall respondents to the "follow-up survey" are positive about the Equine Code. Participants indicated they use the Code as a guide and reference on equine care and handling.

Conclusions

The lack of awareness of the Equine Code as demonstrated in the initial project survey results is a major concern to the equine industry leaders. The concern is supported by the feedback received in the follow-up survey.

Highest risk areas identified in the follow-up survey were rescue facilities and boarding stables where management communication may not be sufficient to achieve acceptable health and welfare of the animals and / or compliance with the Equine Code.

There also is indication that interpretation of compliance to some aspects of the Code was not clear due to vagueness in Code Requirements wording.