



## CHAPTER 16: HORSE SAFETY GUIDELINES

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### Approaching a horse

- A horse's vision is restricted directly in the front and to the rear but its hearing is acute. Always speak to a horse as you approach it. Failure to do so may startle the horse and cause it to kick you.
- Always approach at an angle, never directly from the front or rear. Speak to the horse, let him know you are there.
- Pet a horse by first rubbing a hand on its shoulder or neck. Don't "dab" at the end of a horse's nose.
- Always walk around a horse out of kicking range, or walk close to the horse with contact. Never walk under or step over the tie rope.



### Handling

- Be calm and confident around horses. A nervous handler causes a nervous, unsafe horse.
- While you work, stay close to the horse so that if it kicks, you will not receive the full impact of the kick. Try to stay out of kicking range whenever possible. When you go to the opposite side of a horse, move away from the rear of the horse and go around it, out of kicking range.
- Know your horse, its temperament and reactions. Let it know you are its firm and kind master. Control your temper at all times.
- Always let a horse know what you intend to do. When you pick up a foot, for example, do not grab the foot hurriedly. This will startle the horse and may cause it to kick. Learn the proper way to lift feet (see figures 25-28).
- When you work around a horse, the safest method is to tie or hold the head.
- Work around a horse from a position as near the shoulder as possible.
- Never stand directly behind a horse to work with its tail. Stand off to the side, near the point of the buttock, facing the rear. Grasp the tail and draw it around to you.
- A good equestrian will keep in balance at all times. An accidental slip or stumble can result in unintentional injury by the horse.
- Do not drop grooming tools on the ground near the horse. Place them where they will not be stepped on by the horse or cause you to trip.
- Know the horse's peculiarities. If someone else rides your horse, tell him or her what to expect.
- Teasing a horse may cause it to develop dangerous habits for the rest of its life and put your safety, and the horse's, in serious jeopardy.
- Punish a horse only at the instant of its disobedience. If you wait, even for a minute, it will not understand why it is being punished. Punish without anger. Never strike a horse about its head.
- It is not safe to leave a halter on a horse that is turned loose. When necessary to do so, the horse should be checked daily because some halter materials shrink. Be certain to check the fit



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and make sure the horse can't catch a foot in the halter strap. A halter might catch on posts or other objects causing injury.

- Wear footgear that will protect your feet from being stepped on or from stepping on nails around the stable and barnyard. Riding boots are best. Never go barefooted.

## Leading

- Make the horse walk beside you, not run ahead or lag behind, when leading. A position even with the horse's head or halfway between the horse's head and its shoulder is safest.
- When changing direction, it is safer to turn the horse to the right and walk around it.
- Use a long lead strap and fold the excess strap in a figure-eight style in your left hand when leading. It is customary to lead from the horse's left, or near side, by using the right hand to hold the lead near the halter. Extend your right elbow slightly toward the horse. If the horse makes contact with you, its shoulder will hit your elbow first and move you away from it. Your elbow also can be used on the horse's neck to keep its head and neck straight and controlled, and to prevent the horse from crowding you. Train the horse to be led from both sides.
- Your horse is larger and stronger than you. If it resists, do not get in front of it and try to pull. (See Figure 34 for more information on safe areas.)
- Never wrap the lead strap, halter shank or reins around your hand, wrist or body. A knot at the end of the lead shank aids in maintaining a secure hand grip when needed for control.
- When leading, tying or untying a horse, avoid getting your hands or fingers entangled. Use caution to prevent catching a finger in dangerous positions such as in halter and bridle hardware that includes snaps, bits, rings and loops.
- Be extremely cautious when leading a horse through narrow openings such as a door. Be certain you have firm control and step through first. Step through quickly and get to one side to avoid being crowded.
- Any time you are dismounted or leading the horse, the stirrup irons on an English saddle should be run up, or dressed (slip the stirrups up the leathers). Also, be cautious of stirrups catching on objects when using a western saddle.
- Use judgment when turning a horse loose. It generally is safest to lead a horse completely through the gate or door and turn the horse about, facing the direction from which you just entered. Then release the lead strap or remove the halter or bridle. Make the horse stand quietly while you pet it. Avoid letting a horse bolt away from you when released. Good habits prevent accidents.
- Avoid use of excessively long lead ropes which can become accidentally entangled. Watch the coils when using lariats or lunge lines.





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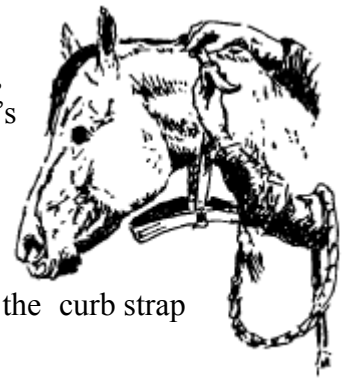
### Tying

- Know and use the proper knots for tying and restraining a horse.
- Tie your horse far enough away from strange horses so they cannot fight.
- Always untie the horse before removing its halter.
- Avoid use of excessively long lead ropes to prevent the horse from becoming accidentally entangled; length of lead rope depends on the size of the horse.
- Always tie a horse in a safe place. Use the halter rope, not the bridle reins.
- Tie your horse a safe distance from other horses, tree limbs or brush where it may become entangled.
- Be certain to tie the horse to an object that is strong and secure and won't break or loosen if the horse pulls back. Never tie below the level of the horse's withers.



### Bridling

- Protect your head from the horse's head when bridling. Stand close, just behind and to one side (preferably on the left side) of the horse's head. Use caution when handling the horse's ears.
- Keep control of the horse when bridling by re-fastening the halter around its neck.
- Be certain the bridle is properly adjusted to fit the horse before you ride. Three points to check are placement of the bit, adjustment of the curb strap and adjustment of the throatlatch.



### Saddling

- Check your saddle blanket and all other equipment for foreign objects. Be certain the horse's back and the cinch or girth areas are clean.
- When using a western double-rigged saddle, remember to fasten the front cinch first and rear cinch last. Unfasten the rear cinch first and front cinch last when unsaddling. Be certain the strap connecting the front and back cinches (along the horse's belly) is secure.
- Fasten accessory straps (tie-downs, breast collars, martingales) after the saddle is cinched. Unfasten them before loosening the cinch. On English equipment, it is sometimes necessary to thread the girth through the martingale loop before the girth is secured.
- The back cinch should not be so loose that your horse can get a hind leg caught between the cinch and its belly.
- When saddling, it is safest to keep the off cinches and stirrup secured over the saddle seat and ease them down when the saddle is on. Do not let them swing wide and hit the horse on the off knee or belly.
- Swing the western saddle into position easily, not suddenly. Dropping the saddle down too quickly or hard may scare the horse. An English saddle is much lighter than a stock saddle. Do not swing the saddle into position. Just lift it and place it into position.

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- Pull up slowly to tighten the cinch. Check the cinch three times:
  - after saddling,
  - after walking a few steps (before riding), and
  - after mounting and riding a short distance.

## Mounting and dismounting

### General

- Never mount or dismount a horse in a barn, or near fences, trees or overhanging projections. You may be injured if a horse sidesteps or rears.
- A horse should stand quietly for mounting and dismounting. Control its head through the reins. If your horse will not stand, ask someone who can handle horses to help you.



### Using English equipment

- Immediately upon dismounting, the rider should “run up” the stirrups. A dangling stirrup may startle or annoy the horse. It is possible for the horse to catch a cheek of the bit or even a hind foot in a dangling stirrup iron when he is going for a fly. The dangling stirrup also can be caught on doorways and other projections while the horse is being led.
- After running up the stirrups, the reins should immediately be brought forward over the horse’s head. In this position, they can be used for leading.

### Using western equipment

- Closed reins, or a romal, should be brought forward over the horse’s head after dismounting.

## Riding

- Keep your horse under control and maintain a secure seat at all times. Horses are easily frightened by unusual objects and noises.
- Until you know your horse, confine your riding to an arena or other enclosed area. Ride in open spaces or unconfined areas after you are familiar with your horse.
- If your horse becomes frightened, remain calm, speak to it quietly, steady it and give it time to overcome its fear. Then ride or lead the horse past the obstacle. Do not hit the horse.
- Hold your horse to a walk when you go up or down a hill.
- Allow the horse to pick its way at a walk when riding on rough ground or in sand, mud, ice or snow where there is danger of the horse slipping or falling.
- Do not fool around. It is dangerous for you and others who may be nearby.
- When riding on roads:
  - never ride bareback,
  - always bridle the horse (riding with just a halter does not give you control),
  - use judgment when riding in pairs or in groups allowing sufficient space between horses,
  - avoid paved or other hard-surfaced roads and walk the horse when crossing such roads,





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- in areas of heavy traffic, it is safest to dismount and lead the horse across, and
- ride on the shoulders or in barrow pits, but watch for junk that can injure a horse.
- Never rush past riders who are proceeding at a slower gait. It startles both horses and riders and can cause accidents. Instead approach slowly, indicate a desire to pass and proceed cautiously on the left.
- Never ride off until all riders are mounted.
- Ride abreast or stay a full horse's length from the horse in front to avoid the possibility of being kicked.
- Walk your horse when you approach and pass through underpasses or ride over bridges.
- When your horse is full of energy, lunge it or ride it in an enclosed area until it is settled.
- Do not let a horse run to and from the stables. Walk the last mile home.
- Know the proper use and purpose of spurs before wearing them.
- Dogs and horses are both good companions, but they may not mix. Keep your dog under control at all times around horses.
- Wear protective headgear when riding. This should be strictly adhered to in any form of riding.

### Riding at night

- Riding at night can be a pleasure, but it can be more hazardous than daytime riding. Walk the horse; fast gaits are dangerous.
- If necessary to ride at night on roads or highways, follow the same rules as for pedestrians. State laws vary regarding which side of the road you should ride. Wear light-colored clothing and carry a flashlight and reflectors. Check your state regulations for details.
- Select a location with care. Choose controlled bridle paths or familiar, safe, open areas.

### Equipment and clothing

- Learn to handle a rope before carrying one on a horse. Always use caution when working with a rope if the horse is not ropebroke. Never tie the rope hard and fast to a saddle horn while roping off a green horse.
- Bridle reins, stirrup leathers, headstalls, curbstraps and cinch straps should be kept in the best possible condition; your safety depends on these straps. Replace any of the straps when they begin to show signs of wear such as cracking.
- Be sure all tack fits the horse. Adjust your tie-downs to a safe length that will not hinder the horse's balance.
- Spurs can trip you when you work on the ground. Take them off when you are not mounted.
- Wear neat, well-fitting clothing that will not become snagged on equipment. Belts, jackets and front chap straps can become hooked over the saddle horn.
- Wear boots or shoes with heels as a safeguard against your foot slipping through the stirrup.
- Keep the horse's feet properly trimmed or shod. Have the horse's teeth checked for any mouth problems.



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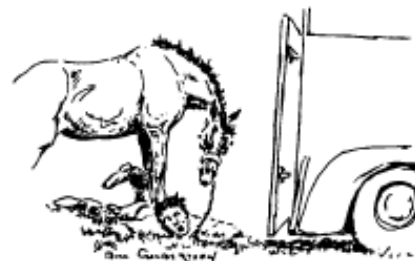
- Gloves are a safeguard against cuts, scratches, splinters and rope burns.
- Do not wear rings or dangling jewelry around horses. They can catch on the halters and other equipment.

## **Wear a helmet**

- Wear a safety approved (ASTM-SEI) helmet. There are many helmet designs available, both western and English.
- More than 17 percent of all horse-related injuries are head injuries. Head injuries are associated with more than 60 percent of all equestrian related deaths.
- Riding helmets are not child's play. Adults, aged 25 and older, account for 53 percent of hospital-treated rider injuries.
- Injuries occur most frequently around or near the home or ranch (60 percent). Wear a helmet and make sure it is fastened securely on your head.

## **Trailer or other hauling**

- Always have at least one person help you when trailering.
- Always stand to one side, never directly behind, when loading or unloading a horse from a trailer or truck.
- Circumstances involved in loading a horse will vary, but the following methods are given in order of preference:
  - Train the horse so it can be sent or led into the trailer.
  - Lead the horse into the left side of a two horse trailer while you stand on the right side of the center divider, or vice versa.
  - With a front loading trailer, it is least desirable to get in front and lead the horse in (never do this without an escape door or front exit; even with a door, use caution; most are awkward to get through) Also, horses have been known to follow the handler out.
- Be certain the ground area behind and around the truck or trailer affords safe footing before loading or unloading.
- It is safest to remove all equipment (bridles, saddles and so forth) before loading. Use your halter.
- Always speak to a horse in a truck or trailer before you attempt to handle it.
- If you have trouble loading or unloading, get experienced help.
- Secure the butt bar or chain before you tie the horse. Use care when you reach for it. Ease it down when you unfasten it to avoid bumping the horse's legs.
- Always untie a horse before opening the gate or door.
- Avoid slick floors. Use matting or some type of bedding for secure footing.





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- Check your trailer regularly for the following:
  - rotting or weakened floor boards.
  - rusted and weakened door hinges.
  - broken hitch welds.
  - when serviced, have a competent mechanic check the spring shackles and wheel bearings.
- Be certain the trailer is of adequate construction and meets state requirements for brakes and lights.
- The trailer should have sufficient height to afford a horse ample neck and head room. Remove or cover any protruding objects.
- When you (or an adult) drive, always observe the following:
  - Double-check all connections (lights, brakes, hitch and safety chains).
  - Close and secure all doors.
  - Drive carefully. Make slow and steady turns; make slow and steady stops.
  - Drive defensively and look ahead to avoid emergencies.
  - When hauling a stallion with other horses, it is safer to load the stallion first and to unload him last.
- Distribute the weight of the load evenly. When hauling one horse, it is safest to load it on the left side of the trailer.
- Never throw lighted cigarettes or matches from a car or truck window because of the danger of fire or of the wind sucking them into the trailer.
- Check the horse and the trailer hitch at every stop before you continue on.
- Opinions vary on whether to haul a horse tied or loose. If you tie it, allow sufficient length of rope so the horse can move its head for balance. Use a safety release or a quick-release knot.
- If hauling in a truck or other open carrier, protect the horse's eyes from wind and foreign objects. Use goggles or some type of wind shield. Do not let the horse put its head out a window.
- Horses are like people; some get motion sickness. Adjust the horse's feeding schedule to avoid travel when the horse is full of feed and water. Feed smaller amounts or avoid feeding grain before the trip.

### Trail riding

- If you plan to ride alone, tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Ride a well-mannered horse.
- Do not play practical jokes and indulge in horseplay.
- Watch where you ride — avoid dangerous ground. Note landmarks. Study the country and view behind you so you will know how it looks when you ride out.
- Courtesy is the best safety on the trail.
- Think of your horse first. Watch its condition, avoid injuries and care for it properly.
- Carry a good pocket knife to cut ropes in case of entanglement.
- Ride balanced and erect to avoid tiring the horse or causing a sore back and legs.
- Check the equipment.
  - Have a halter and rope. Hobbles are fine if the horse is trained to them.



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- Have clean saddle blankets or pads.
- Be certain the equipment is in good repair and fits the horse.
- Include bad weather clothing.
- A pair of wire cutters is handy in case the horse becomes entangled in wire.
- A lariat is handy for many needs, but know how to use one and be certain the horse is accustomed to a rope.
- Other helpful equipment includes pieces of leather or rawhide for repairs, spare horseshoe nails and matches.
- When you unsaddle, store your gear properly. Place the saddle blanket where it will stay dry. Keep your gear covered overnight.
- Do not water your horse when it is hot. Cool the horse first. Water the horse out a few sips at a time.
- Always tie a horse in a safe place. Use the halter rope — not the bridle reins. Never tie the rope below the level of the horse's withers. Be certain to tie it to an object that is strong and secure and will not break or come loose if the horse pulls back.
- Be extremely cautious of matches and fires. Know they are out before discarding them or leaving them unattended.
- Obtain current, accurate maps and information on the area. Become familiar with the terrain and climate.
- If you ride on federal or state land, get advice from the forest or park officials. Know their trail use and fire regulations.
- Be certain the horse is in proper physical condition and its hooves and shoes are ready for the trail.
- Use extreme caution at wet spots or boggy places.
- Riding at a fast speed on the trail is unsafe. Ride at safe gaits.
- Avoid overhanging tree limbs. Warn the rider behind you when you encounter an overhanging limb. Watch the rider ahead so a limb pushed aside doesn't snap back and slap the horse or you in the face.



### Fire safety guidelines

Most horse owners assume “it couldn't happen to me.” Fire is the most terrible death that can happen to a horse, because the horse is penned within its corral and stable. Fire prevention and safety are the duty of every person involved with horses. Fire safety involves common sense and a trained response.

Be safety conscious at all times. Fires give little warning. Post the number of the local fire department by all telephones. Fire prevention is a vital part of horse ownership and management.



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### Stable fires

Almost all horse barns are made of or contain these flammable materials: wood; bedding straw or wood shavings; highly combustible materials (leather, blankets, ropes, oils, etc.) Hay, bedding straw or wood shavings are also stored close to barns.

A horse standing in a bed of straw might just as well be standing in a pool of gasoline should a fire occur. The burning rate of loose straw is approximately three times that of the burning rate of gasoline. The horse in a stall where fire originates has only 30 seconds to escape. The flames spread and heat is so rapid that a fire, once started, is out of control in a matter of minutes.

Automatic sprinkler systems are advocated for facilities such as racetracks, large breeding establishments and other commercial-type enterprises. However, from a monetary point of view, automatic sprinkler systems generally are not included in the smaller scale operations. Water-type fire extinguishers are effective if used within the first minute. Since stable fires develop rapidly due to the abundance of combustible materials, fire extinguishers are of little or no use once the fire has burned for 60 seconds or more.

Fire spreads rapidly, as does panic. Quick action is necessary to save the life of a horse. Trainers, organizations and parents should teach fire prevention and safety. As schools have fire drills for students, so should barn managers and trainers instruct students as to the course of action to follow in case of a fire.

### **30 seconds is all your horse may have**

#### **Plan now**

- Know where fire alarms are located.
- Know where fire equipment is located.
- Know where water is located.
- Know how to use fire extinguishing equipment.

*Post the fire department number in a prominent place*

#### **Plan of action**

- Call the fire department.
- Begin evacuating horses.
- Open all outside access gates to the stable area.
- Keep roads clear for fire equipment access.
- Use first aid fire fighting equipment (hand extinguishers, buckets and so forth).
- Meet the fire fighters and direct them to the fire.

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The following procedures, with individual modifications, could be used.

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of fire:**

- Call the fire department.
- Evacuate horses.
  - Use halters and lead ropes.
  - Blindfold, if necessary, using scarves, handkerchiefs or gunny sacks.
  - Move to holding area away from barn site such as an adjacent riding arena, and out of the way of fire fighting equipment.
- Open all access gates to the barn area.
- Until help arrives, use available fire fighting equipment.
  - extinguishers,
  - hoses,
  - wet gunny sacks and
  - shovels, dirt.
- Keep roads clear for fire equipment.

## **Fire prevention measures**

In the general barn area:

- Clean and dispose of debris.
- Provide adequate water outlets with hoses attached.
- Install an outside phone with a prominent display of fire department number.
- Store feed, bedding straw or wood shavings at a safe distance from barns, and
- Spray for weeds surrounding general area.

Within the barn:

- ensure no smoking is allowed in the barn,
- have adequate water outlets with hoses attached,
- dispose of oily rags immediately after use, and
- check all electrical wiring periodically for frayed ends, doubled-up extension cords and so forth.

*In the event of a wildfire in the area, don't wait until the last possible moment to move your horses. Brush fires travel with alarming speed and can cover many miles in a matter of minutes. Winds fan flames and can carry firebrands that cause the fire to jump ridges and spread to different areas within minutes.*



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### Other possible fire situations

#### *Trail riding in the mountains*

- Absolutely no smoking on the trail.
- Advise a responsible party of your route and estimated time of return, whether you ride in a group or by yourself.
- Familiarize yourself with the terrain.
- Any organized ride, as a safety rule, should have an alternate escape route planned.
- In the event you come upon a fire, the personal safety of you and your horse is your primary concern.
  - Assess the situation and use your best judgment.
  - Under normal conditions, try to get away from the fire area.
  - Proceed to a safe area.

#### *Horse shows*

- Follow proper parking procedures. Do not block street entrances or fire hydrants.
- Never padlock your horse in a stall.

<b>Horse safety commandments</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Buy or ride a safe horse.</li><li>• Don't be overmounted.</li><li>• Know your horse.</li><li>• Don't surprise your horse.</li><li>• Check your tack.</li><li>• Watch small children.</li><li>• Tie your horse with care.</li><li>• Know trailer safety.</li><li>• Don't crowd others.</li><li>• No clowning, please.</li></ul>