

What to do if You Suspect Neglect

Many cases of horse neglect are discovered thanks to the observations and actions of concerned citizens. However, community members often feel a sense of moral duty to take action or "rescue" horses that look as though they are in need. If you find yourself in such a situation there are few things to keep in mind.

1. Do not enter someone else's fenced property. Most states have laws against trespassing without consent of the land owner or other legal authority. If you do enter someone else's property, your actions will most likely be considered criminal and you could face prosecution.
2. Get your facts straight. Write down a description of the horse and its location with enough details for law enforcement to locate the horse if you are not present. If you know the name of the owner or the barn where the horse is located, make a note of that as well. When reporting neglect, you will have to include your own name and contact information so that officials can contact you for more information.
3. Call the police. If the horse is within city limits, you should contact the municipal police department and if the horse is outside city limits, contact the county sheriff's department. To find out what number to call, visit www.usacops.com and click on the appropriate state and county for contact information. Relate the facts calmly. The police may immediately refer you to an animal control office, the state Department of Agriculture, the Humane Society or the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), depending on your community's policy for handling animal neglect situations. The police, as well as the SPCA and the Humane Society have the authority to obtain search warrants and seize horses from property and conduct investigations of neglect.

As a concerned citizen, you are protected by the law against suit by the horse owner or caretaker as long as your concern is genuine and you believe the horse to be in serious danger. Citizens may not be protected from a law suit if they make unfounded accusations against someone for personal reasons. It is acceptable to follow-up on your report of neglect but understand that officials usually cannot comment on cases that are under investigation.

The information on this page was taken, in part, from an article that appeared in the Equine Post in 2004. To read the article in full, visit <http://www.equinepost.com>