Disposal

After the horse has been euthanased, the question of what to do with the body remains. If the animal has been taken to an abattoir, carcass disposal can be very expensive. Removing the body from the site of euthanasia is not an easy process and may be distressing for those who have been involved with the horse during its lifetime. Thus, it is wise for the owner to leave the site before the body is removed. Vets are often willing to assist in arranging for a carcass to be removed.

Burial

European legislation prevents the burial of any horse that has been used as part of a commercial enterprise. When a horse has been kept solely as a pet it may be possible to bury it on your own land but, in order to seek permission from the Local Authority, it is essential to prove that the site of burial is near to a water source then it is extremely unlikely that permission will be granted.

Even if permission to bury a horse is obtained it is important to consider the practicalities. The size of the hole required means that heavy plant machinery is likely to be needed and the grave is unlikely to be able to be dug quickly. If you do not feel that you are capable of this then you should not be directly involved in the process for instance, holding the horse. It may be helpful to have an experienced friend in attendance who will also be able to stay with you after the horse has gone.

The removal of the body is not a pleasant experience and it is not recommended that the owner is present for this. By planning in advance and there is nothing to gain by being there.

Other Horses

Although in many situations it is not feasible, you may wish to allow other horses to see and sniff the body after euthanasia has taken place and the site has been secured. However, don’t be surprised if the horses choose to ignore the body, this is not unusual.

Passports

After the death of a horse you are legally obliged to inform the relevant Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) and return the passport to them within 30 days. Many PIOs will return the passport to you afterwards. If you require it as a keepsake.

Insurance

If your horse is insured, it is important to know exactly what the policy covers if euthanasia is required. You should also be aware of the process and, in many cases, only a small contribution will be made towards the costs required. The level of cover varies greatly with different policies and, in many cases, only a small contribution will be made towards the costs involved. The rest of the expense must be met by the horse owner.

If your horse is being euthanased for non-commercial reasons, it is important to know exactly what the policy covers if euthanasia is required. You should also be aware of the process and, in many cases, only a small contribution will be made towards the costs involved. The rest of the expense must be met by the horse owner.


disposal of the body. If your horse has been euthanased because of an emergency you should contact the insurance company as soon as possible afterwards.

Under no circumstances should a horse be allowed to die of starvation or neglect. Even if you do insure your horse you should have contingency plans to fund euthanasia and disposal should this become necessary.

Afterwards

The death of a horse is not an easy event to cope with. For many people it is like losing a member of the family. The deep feelings of grief are absolutely normal. It is often helpful to talk to friends or family about your feelings. If your loss is too great or you would like someone to speak with, you may find it helpful to contact a specialist pet bereavement counsellors who you may feel more comfortable talking to. There is no need to feel silly or embarrassed about mourning the loss of your friend. There are specialist pet bereavement counsellors who you may find it helpful to contact if you feel necessary.

Despite their sadness, some people feel the need to purchase another horse quickly. For others it may be months or years before they feel ready. Either scenario is completely normal and you should feel no guilt about your actions. However, if you do decide that you wish to purchase another horse quickly, it is vital to ensure that you are buying the right horse for your needs and not just rushing into buying any horse simply to fill the void.

Euthanasia is not an easy topic to talk or even think about. However, we owe it to our horses to understand the process and to be prepared as far as is possible should the worst happen. The right care at the end of a horse’s life is the last, and possibly greatest, thing we can do for them.

The Welfare Welfare team are always willing to talk about euthanasia and provide any information, advice and support that may be needed at a difficult time.
In these instances, it may be prudent to consult your vet and insurance company in order to establish whether you are covered in these circumstances. However, it is never acceptable to allow a horse to suffer unnecessarily for the sake of financial considerations.

The widely held perception that life should be preserved at all costs must always be questioned. Euthanasia is often the most reasonable course of action and the most appropriate to a horse’s welfare. It is far more welfare-friendly to give a horse a dignified and timely end to its life than to allow it to suffer or be pushed to the point of no return.

Abortion

Euthanasia (also known as ‘putting to sleep’ or ‘putting down’) is sadly something that many horse owners have to face. The reality is that very few horses simply pass away peacefully due to old age. In most cases there is no straightforward answer to the question of what reasons justify the decision that a horse should be put to sleep.

Abortion should be considered as a viable option if a horse genuinely compromises this, and reasonable steps to correct its behaviour have failed, then euthanasia should be considered as a viable option.

Lethal Injection

The method used to euthanise a horse should be given careful consideration beforehand. There are a number of options available, each of which has its own pros and cons.

When and Why?

There is no straightforward answer to the question of reasons why the decision that a horse should be euthanised, apart from the obvious exception of catastrophic injury or illness. Every situation is different and veterinary or professional advice should always be sought where any doubt exists.

For many horses, the decision to put them to sleep will need to be taken when their quality of life deteriorates. However, it is not always easy to assess quality of life, particularly if you see the horse every day. This makes it difficult to notice gradual changes. Even if horses are well cared for, the following points may help when trying to assess quality of life.

Lethal injection can only be administered by a veterinary surgeon and will consist of an overdose of a sedative or anaesthetic drug. It most commonly involves the lethal injection being given before the fatal dose. Shortly after the anaesthetic injection the horse will fall to the ground, where the vet will inject its pupil to ensure it has ceased to breathe or to stop the horse from breathing. The horse itself will not be conscious during this time and is completely unaware of what is going on. Consequently, a second anaesthetic injection may be needed to ensure the heart stops but, again, the horse will not be suffering at this point.

Free Bullet

A veterinary surgeon or trained and licensed professional may dispatch a horse using the free bullet. Consequently, this is the method used by knackermans and hunters.

Abortion

An equine abortion is usually the choice to ensure a horse as owners will normally be paid for the foal. However, abortion is not an option for every horse as many will have been signed-off for food chain purposes. The abortion information will be included in the horse’s passport which the current owner will either own or because they have received a medication during their lifetime.

Free Bullet

The horse will tend to fall quite slowly but this is unpredictable, meaning that the safety of the vet and the owner will be considered. However, a skilled handler can influence the direction in which the animal collapses. Many vets will allow the owner to hold the horse while the injections are administered but it is essential that the owner is not going to remain near the process and if he or she is likely to become too emotional it may be necessary for the owner to be able to walk away from the site of the injection. If the horse itself has an injection has implications for the disposal of the horse’s carcass. Animals that have been injected may be seen to be unsuitable for human food chain and should not be used for animal food.

When? An abortion is usually performed in the vast majority of cases as the result of a pesky eye and to prevent the need to queue. Where an abortion may be appropriate, can be in the case of an inoperable tumour, with the animal kept in the absence of the owner to prevent the need to queue.

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