

This guidance is intended for those responsible for construction sites ('the site') in the vicinity of bridleways, byways, roads, permissive paths and open access areas used by horse riders and horse-drawn carriage drivers ('equestrians') adjacent to or crossing the site.

This advice applies equally to any work site where sudden noise or movement may occur, e.g. tree-felling, ditch clearance, vegetation cutting.

On Site

The Health and Safety specification and briefing for all attending the site should include a section covering use of routes or areas by equestrians with the guidance below.

All members of the construction and operational work force and visitors should be made aware of the equestrian routes or areas affected by the site.

If a banksman is employed to control vehicle movements and activities they should be fully briefed about the possibility of horses being in the area and the necessary actions to be taken for the safety of horse and rider or driver and others in the vicinity.

Warning notices should be displayed in advance of the site describing the hazards for both equestrians and the construction site workers or visitors and requesting the co-operation of all.

Horses' Reactions

Horses have a natural instinct to run away from the unknown or unusual. Sudden noise and movement are likely triggers and horses can sense, see and hear things which humans may not be aware of or take for granted. Quiet rustlings and sudden bangs can be more of a trigger than a continuous mechanical noise such as a digger working.

Sudden movement or noises of machinery should be avoided where horses are within range. A machine making a movement is more of a threat than one that is still. Operators must be able to shut off machinery or to stop movement and noise while horses pass.

Machinery or activity should not resume until horses are at least twenty metres past. If it is not possible for activity to be halted, staff should be at the location to warn approaching equestrians as appropriate. Such 'sentries' should be obvious on approach, not hidden behind a tree or equipment as suddenly appearing could be an additional stress factor causing a horse to bolt.

If a horse appears distressed—stops dead, jerks sideways, prances about, takes flight, spins round or shies away or acts in any way other than a calm forward motion—or an equestrian appears to be struggling for control, or shouts, all movement and noise should cease immediately to avoid escalating the situation.

Activity should not resume unless the equestrian indicates that it is safe to do so or is out of sight or more than one hundred metres away.

Do not resume as soon as a horse has become still as the rider may not yet have regained control and the horse may not have accepted the situation but be taking stock and easily frightened again. Wait until the equestrian signals that it is safe to continue, with a wave, smile, nod or call.

Obstruction and Surface

Access to any public highway must be unrestricted. A route must be kept free of obstruction, debris and trip hazards and for the full width of the route. Providing part of the width is still an illegal obstruction.

The surface of equestrian routes should be maintained in a manner suitable for horses. It must not be slippery or contain sharp stones (see BHS Surfaces guidance). Existing surfaces may need to be protected to avoid poaching or other damage.

If used, any temporary fencing alongside the route must be secured taut and not flapping in the wind. 'Heras' type fencing is sometimes covered with plastic for privacy or to prevent windblown debris but it is almost impossible to secure so that it does not flap and rustle in wind and it should never be used alongside equestrian routes unless it can be secured tightly enough and remain tight. Frequent checks, especially in breezy weather will be required and diligent attention to maintaining the sheeting taut.

A route should be at least four metres wide to ensure that users can pass each other with ease without brushing against adjacent fences, walls or hedges. Vegetation should be cut so that the full width can be used if necessary.

Hazards overhead such as branches, cables or derricks should provide at least 3.4m clearance, preferably 3.7m in case a horse takes fright and jumps or rears.

For wind energy development sites, see the BHS publication Wind Turbines and Horses – Guidance for Planners and Developers.

IMPORTANT This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. The Society recommends seeking advice specific to a site where it is being relied upon.