

The law and management of public access rights vary widely between the four countries of the United Kingdom. Practical elements of the following advice apply in all of them but the law in Scotland and Northern Ireland may differ from in England and Wales.

Riders and drivers of horses are referred to generically as equestrians.

More advice is available on www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice.

IMPORTANT This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. Where it is being relied upon, The Society strongly recommends seeking its advice specific to the site.

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This guidance is intended for those responsible for any construction site ('the site') near routes or areas used with horses (ridden or driven) such as bridleways, byways, roads, permitted paths and open access areas which may be adjacent to or crossing the site.

This advice applies equally to any work site where noise or movement may occur, e.g. tree-felling, ditch clearance, vegetation cutting, alongside a road, byway or bridleway or other route used with horses.

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 horse-riders and drivers (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 reaching the site describing the hazards for both equestrians and the construction site workers or visitors and requesting the co-operation of all.

Horses' reactions

A horse's instinct is to run away from the unknown or threatening. 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.

Only horses know what they are thinking. One day they may seem to react to something they have previously ignored, or they might be reacting to something invisible or unheard by humans. They could be reacting to the rider being startled.

A machine making a movement can be more of a threat than one that is still, although even a still machine where there has not been one before may unsettle some horses. Operators should be able to shut off machinery or stop movement and noise while horses pass and avoid starting up a machine or initiating movement while horses are in range.

Machinery or activity should not resume until horses are at least twenty metres past unless it is clear that horse and rider/driver are untroubled. If it is not possible for activity to be halted, banksmen should be at the location to warn approaching equestrians as appropriate. They 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 react.

If a horse appears distressed—freezes, jerks sideways, prances about, takes flight, spins round or shies away or acts in any way other than a calm forward motion—all movement and noise should stop 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 fifty metres away.

Do not resume as soon as a horse has become still, wait until the equestrian signals that it is safe to continue, with a wave, smile, nod or call, or is out of range. They may be too busy trying to settle the horse to vocalise a thanks, so please take it as given rather than rudeness.

Obstruction and surface

Access to any public highway must be unrestricted (a bridleway or byway is a highway). A route must be kept free of obstruction, debris and trip hazards and for the full width of the route. Obstructing part of the width is still illegal even if you think there is space to pass. Horses need a greater width to pass safely than a pedestrian. Tight spaces are more likely to trigger a reaction, especially in conjunction with noise and movement and a challenging environment.

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 Advice on Surfaces www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice). Existing grass or soft surfaces may need to be protected from construction traffic to avoid poaching or other damage.

Fencing and flags

Any temporary fencing such as orange safety barrier mesh alongside the route should be secured taut. 'Heras' type security fencing is sometimes covered with sheeting to prevent windblown debris and it should be avoided alongside routes used with horses unless it can be secured tightly enough and remain taut. Frequent checks, especially in breezy weather, will be required with diligent attention to maintaining the sheeting taut. Also avoid loose packaging on stored material which may move in wind and be audible or visible from the horse route.

Similarly, flags (traditional and 'feather' flags) and banners should be avoided near equestrian routes. Flags are commonly used promotional items but can cause great difficulty for equestrians with horses not trained with them.

Width and height

A route should have a usable width of at least three metres so users can pass each other with ease. Surface 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.

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