

The Realities of Backyard Horse Abuse

What it looks like:

Horse abuse can occur anywhere -- from a backyard pasture, to a private or public boarding stable. Whenever a horse owner fails to properly care for a horse, or cares for it erratically, there is potential risk for abuse and neglect.

Some of the signs of backyard neglect include:

- * unusually thin, ribby horses
- * lack of condition -- dull coat & glazed eyes
- * untended & overgrown hooves
- * lethargic manner

Failure to provide proper medical care is also a form of backyard abuse. Symptoms of animals in need of a veterinarian's care include:

- * limping (any form of lameness) or extreme stiffness
- * reluctance to move
- * a "sawhorse" stance -- front legs will be extended (sign of founder)
- * any unusual discharge from the nose, mouth, eyes, or wound
- * weakness or distress

Beating and overworking are also forms of backyard abuse. Symptoms of an overworked horse include:

- * cuts & whip welts
- * spur marks
- * tack sores
- * extreme fear, depression, and distrust

What you can do:

If you have reason to believe that a horse is in distress, contact the local humane society, SPCA, animal control agency, the state's cooperative extension service, or as a last resort, the police (Sheriff, State Police). When you report a potential animal abuse case to the authorities, give as complete a description of the animal(s) as possible and the date and time you observed the animal. Animal control agencies will also need the exact street address of the animals in order to investigate. Two cautionary notes: 1) **never** trespass on private property; and 2) if you are not knowledgeable about horses, be aware that horses vary in size, and body condition, and may already be under a veterinarian's care. When reporting a case, do not be afraid to give your name. The authorities should not use your name without your permission. Once you do initiate an investigation, follow up, to make sure the situation has been investigated and resolved. If no one is willing to investigate, contact AHPA at (202) 965-0500.

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