

AAEP Euthanasia Guidelines (2011)

The AAEP recommends that the following guidelines be considered in evaluating the need for humane euthanasia of a horse. The attending veterinarian is often able to assist in making this determination, especially regarding the degree to which the horse is suffering. It should be pointed out that each case should be addressed on its individual merits. The following guidelines are guidelines only. It is not necessary for all of these criteria to be met. Horses may be euthanized at an owner's request for other reasons, as the owner has sole responsibility for the horse's care. Prior to euthanasia, clear determination of the insurance status of the horse should be made as an insurance policy constitutes a contract between the horse owner(s) and the insurance carrier.

In accordance with AVMA's position on euthanasia of animals, the AAEP accepts that humane euthanasia of unwanted horses or those deemed unfit for adoption is an acceptable procedure once all available alternatives have been explored with the client. A horse should not have to endure conditions of lack of feed or care erosive of the animal's quality of life. This is in accord with the role of the veterinarian as animal advocate.

The following are guidelines to assist in making humane decisions regarding euthanasia of horses.

- A horse should not have to endure continuous or unmanageable pain from a condition that is chronic and incurable.
 - A horse should not have to endure a medical or surgical condition that has a hopeless chance of survival.
 - A horse should not have to remain alive if it has an unmanageable medical condition that renders it a hazard to itself or its handlers.
 - A horse should not have to receive continuous analgesic medication for the relief of pain for the rest of its life.
 - A horse should not have to endure a lifetime of continuous individual box stall confinement for prevention or relief of unmanageable pain or suffering.
- Techniques for Euthanasia – The following techniques for performing euthanasia of horses by properly trained personnel are deemed acceptable:

1. Intravenous administration of an overdose of barbiturates.
2. [Gunshot to the brain](#) (Shearer JK, Nicoletti P. Humane euthanasia of sick, injured and/or debilitated livestock. University of Florida IFAS Extension).
3. [Penetrating captive bolt to the brain](#) (Shearer JK, Nicoletti P. Humane euthanasia of sick, injured and/or debilitated livestock. University of Florida IFAS Extension).
4. Intravenous administration of a solution of concentrated potassium chloride (KCl) with the horse in a surgical plane of general anesthesia.
5. Alternative methods may be necessary in special circumstances.

Special Considerations for the Insured Horse and Cases Involving Multiple Practitioners:

Each insurance policy for a horse is a contract between the horse owner and the

insurance company and will dictate the specific terms and conditions concerning the payment of a mortality claim. Careful consideration should be given to possible “conflicts of interest” as referenced in the Ethical and Professional Guidelines in the AAEP Resource Guide and Membership Directory. The attending, consulting and referring veterinarians should follow the Ethical and Professional Guidelines under section IV, “Attending, Consulting and Referring,” as described in the AAEP Resource Guide & Membership Directory.

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