



A HORSE OWNER'S GUIDE TO EUTHANASIA

Sadly most horse, pony and donkey owners will have to face the prospect of having their animal put to sleep at some time, and it's very important to realise that a lack of forward planning can make matters worse. A responsible horse owner should be aware of the costs of euthanasia and disposal and be prepared for this eventuality.

Reasons for choosing to have a horse put to sleep include old age, where the horse's condition has deteriorated to such an extent it no longer has an acceptable quality of life, serious injury or a disease/illness that cannot be treated.

Please remember that a vet can only offer advice and cannot take the decision for a horse owner to have their horse put to sleep.

Quality of life for a horse includes being able to graze for most of the day, being able to get up and down without assistance, being able to walk, trot and preferably canter around a field where it should ideally have company and not be subject to bullying from field mates.

Options for euthanasia

Horses are euthanased by one of two methods:

- 1) By injections – the horse is given a dose of sedation followed by a larger, lethal dose of barbituate.
- 2) By human killer (gun)

Euthanasia by lethal injection can only be carried out by a vet. The horse is rapidly rendered unconscious but it's sometimes necessary to give a second dose of the injection to stop the heart. The vet will remain with the horse until until he/she can confirm that the heart has stopped beating.

Horses should be only put to sleep by gun by a trained and competent person who has a licence to use a firearm. When a horse is very needle shy, this method may be the only option and should be thought about very carefully in advance. A dose of sedative to calm a horse can only be given by a vet intravenously, so it may be preferable to euthanase by lethal injection those animals which require sedation. If euthanasia is elective however, we can supply oral sedation to calm the horse.

The Site of Euthanasia

In non emergency situations the site of euthanasia should be carefully considered. It's kinder to put a horse to sleep in familiar surroundings and, from a practical point of view, there should be good vehicular access. Where a pair-bond is in residence, it's often a good idea for the body to be left in-situ so that the friend has a chance to accept that the animal is dead. General safety of everyone involved in the procedure should also be taken into consideration. A rug or blanket on hand to cover the body until it's collected or buried may reduce distress to anyone who may be in the vicinity.

If it's not possible to have the horse put to sleep at home, then the owner is responsible for making sure the horse is fit to travel. A vet should be consulted as both the owner and the vet must comply with the Welfare of Animals(Transport) Order 1997.

It's the responsibility of the horse owner to make arrangements for the disposal of the horse's body. Horses put to sleep by lethal injection can only be cremated or buried (subject to certain legal restrictions). Hunt kennels may be able to collect, but prior arrangements should be made directly with them. Specialist knackermen are usually known to the vet and he/she should be able to help you contact them. Burial of horses is now restricted by law. DEFRA, as well as the National Rivers Authority and the Environmental Health Departments need to be contacted.

If your horse is cremated you can have ashed back in a casket or to scatter in your horses' favourite place. There are some very good jewellery companies who can make keepsakes from mane/tail or shoes, which you may want to consider.

Once the decision has been made, it may not be appropriate for the owner to stay with their horse as their own distress may upset the horse. Everyone involved will understand if the owner wishes to say goodbye and then leave the horse in the capable hands of the professional who will treat the horse kindly and with respect.

Insurance Claims

Euthanasia of an insured horse must be confirmed and the reason for doing so. A veterinary certificate is usually required and in some cases a post-mortem. In non-emergency situations, it's vital to contact the insurance company in advance.

Bereavement

The Pet Bereavement Support Service provides a telephone helpline which is available 7 days a week and an email address: pbss@bluecross.org.uk. This is manned by a national network of trained volunteer befrienders.

Westover Veterinary Centre (Large animals)

Manor Farm, Old Church Road, Hainford, Norfolk NR10 3BG

Tel: 01603 899930 Fax: 01603 893640

Email: adminla@westovervets.co.uk Web: www.westovervets.co.uk