

# NATIONAL EQUINE WELFARE COUNCIL



# CODE OF PRACTICE

## for Tethering Equines

1<sup>st</sup> Revision 30<sup>th</sup> August 2002  
2<sup>nd</sup> Revision 19<sup>th</sup> May 2005  
3<sup>rd</sup> Revision 1<sup>st</sup> November 2006

## **Scope**

These guidelines have been developed by the National Equine Welfare Council following consultation with its members.

The guidelines are provided for all inspectors, from government level through to welfare organisations, who have dealings with tethered equines to ensure that high standards are maintained nationwide.

Tethering is not a suitable method of long-term management of an animal, as it restricts that animal's freedom to exercise itself, to find food and water, or to escape from either predators or the extremes of hot and cold weather. It also risks an animal becoming entangled, or injuring itself, on tethering equipment.

Tethering may be a useful short-term method of animal management during brief stops during a journey, to prevent danger to the animal, or to humans, whilst proper long-term arrangements are made, or in medical cases where short-term restriction of food intake is required under veterinary advice. The need for regular supervision is paramount.

For the purposes of this booklet Horses, Ponies, Donkeys, Asses & Mules will be referred to as equines.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and World Horse Welfare (WHW) are to be thanked for their advice in producing these guidelines.

### **Disclaimer**

These guidelines are given in good faith. Under no circumstances can the National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) accept any liability for the way in which they are interpreted; or any loss, damage, death or injury caused thereby, since this depends on circumstances wholly outside of NEWC's control.

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**Tethering can be defined as securing an animal by an attached chain or rope, to a centre point or anchorage, causing it to be confined to a desired area.**

Where tethering is to be used, the following conditions should be met.

### **Suitability of the Equine**

- 1.1 Young equines (ie: horses under one year old) should not be tethered.
- 1.2 Pregnant equines should not be tethered in the last third of pregnancy.
  - 1.3 Nursing mothers should not be tethered
  - 1.4 Mares should not be tethered near stallions
  - 1.5 Stallions should not be tethered
  - 1.6 Sick equines should not be tethered
  - 1.7 Old (over 20 years old) equines should not be tethered.

## **Site**

The site is the area to which the tethered equine has access.

- 2.1** The site should be reasonably level, have good grass cover, and be free of any objects, natural or man made, which could ensnare the tether.
- 2.2** A site in which a high proportion of the herbage consists of weeds is not suitable.
- 2.3** The site should not be waterlogged.
- 2.4** The site should not be crossed by any public right of way.
- 2.5** The site should not have anything on it which might injure an equine.
- 2.6** The site should not be used without the written permission of the landowner.
- 2.7** Sites for different equines should not overlap.

## **Tethering Equipment**

- 3.1** Either a well-fitting leather head collar, or a broad leather neck strap must be used. These should be fitted with a 360° swivel device where the chain is attached.
- 3.2** The chain should be approximately 20 ft in length, must be strong enough to prevent breakage, but light enough to prevent pressure sores from the tethering equipment. Rope should not be used.
- 3.3** The ground stake must not protrude above ground level, and must be fitted with a 360° swivel.

## **Food and water**

- 4.1 In many cases the site will provide adequate food in the form of grass; where this is the case the tether site should be changed at least once daily to ensure the quality of the pasture.
- 4.2 If the grass is not sufficient for the equine's need, sufficient forage food should be available throughout each day.
- 4.3 Water should be made available at all times in a trough or spill-proof container.
- 4.4 Containers for concentrate food should be kept in a clean and safe condition.

## **Shelter**

- 5.1 Equines should not be exposed to the full heat of the sun, to heavy rain, snow or hail, or to strong winds for other than very short periods. In extremes of weather shelter should be provided.
- 5.2 Shelter should at a minimum provide shade from the sun, and shelter from the wind. In prolonged rain, a dry area must be available.

## **Exercise**

- 6.1 Equines must be given freedom to exercise off the tether for a reasonable period at least once a day.

## **Supervision**

- 7.1 Tethered equines require a high level of supervision, and should be inspected at no more than six hourly intervals during normal waking hours.
- 7.2 Provision should be made for rapid action to be taken in the event of a sudden change of weather or other circumstances.

## **Identification**

- 8.1 All tethered equines must be marked in such a way as to be permanently identifiable, and from this identification the legal owner should be able to be readily contacted.
- 8.2 This could be achieved by use of a freeze-brand or microchip registered with a 24-hour access database.
- 8.3 Alternatively the equine could have permanently affixed to it a tag or similar notice giving full details of the owner.

## **Other requirements**

- 9.1 It should be remembered that tethered equines need anti-helminthic treatment, foot care, and veterinary attention when sick or injured.
- 9.2 They may need protection from ill-intentioned persons.

## **THE FIVE FREEDOMS - in relation to equine tethering**

The five freedoms are a series of tests, devised by experts in animal welfare, against which to measure different animal management systems.

Few systems supply all freedoms at all times, but the aim should be that any method of animal management is consistent with these Five Freedoms

**Freedom from hunger and thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

Tethered animals are rarely hungry, as they are usually tethered on pasture and moved once they have eaten the grass within the area of the tether. The pasture may be wasteland of poor quality and weed infested. Poor body condition, indicative of hunger, is not a major feature of tethered horses. Water supply is generally intermittent, and dependent on human activity. There is no significant evidence of dehydration as a problem, but severe thirst may temporarily afflict tethered horses, especially in hot weather.

*The freedom from hunger is usually satisfied, but freedom from thirst is entirely dependent on human intervention.*

**Freedom from discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

Roofed shelter is nearly always unavailable to tethered horses, but there may be some wind-break effect from nearby buildings or trees. Rugs are not commonly used. In good weather, and when the pasture is good, horses would probably be happy to lie down, but in many instances there is no comfortable lying area. Rain, and the associated wind-chill factor must be distressing to tethered horses.

*This freedom is not supplied by tethering, other than during ideal weather conditions.*

**Freedom from injury, disease and pain** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

The sort of makeshift equipment commonly used to tether animals can often lead to injury to the neck where a tether is attached, and to leg injuries due to entanglement with the tether. It is quite common to find minor injuries and illness untreated. Veterinary attention is rare.

*Freedom from injury is not supplied by tethering. Provision of veterinary attention etc. is independent of tethering.*

**Freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals own kind.

The horse normally ranges over a wide area for grazing, and will exercise itself quite vigorously for pleasure. Loose horses often roll. These activities are not possible for tethered horses. Whilst other horses may be tethered nearby direct contact between horses is not allowed, to avoid entanglement of tethers.

*Tethering for long periods does not allow the horse any freedom of behaviour.*

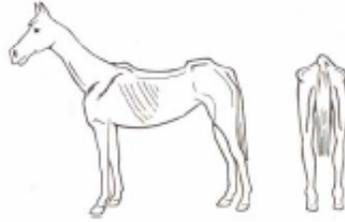
**Freedom from fear and distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

A horse's natural reaction to fear is flight. Tethered horses cannot do this. There have been instances of tethered animals being injured by dogs and humans, due to their inability to flee. This may well cause suffering greater than the simple pain involved. A horse is a natural athlete in many instances, and long term confinement to a small area is likely to cause frustration and boredom.

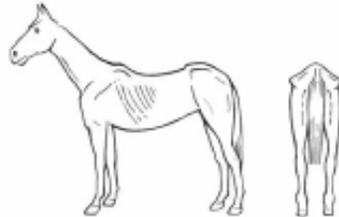
*This freedom is not supplied by tethering.*

## Appendix I – Body Condition Scoring - Horses

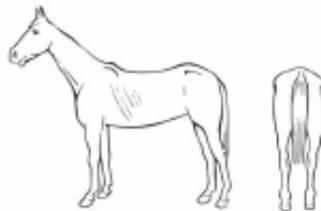
**0 Very Poor**



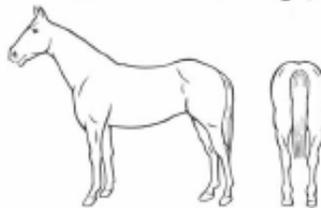
**1 Poor**



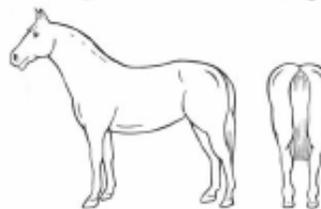
**2 Moderate**



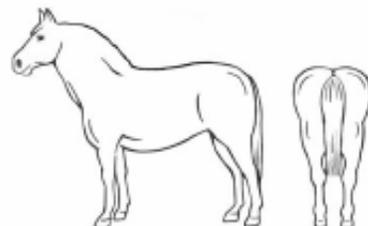
**3 Good**



**4 Fat**



**5 Very Fat**



## Appendix I – Body Condition Scoring - Horses

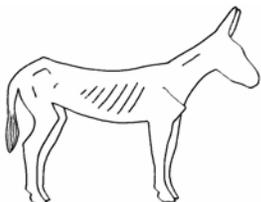
<b>C/S</b>	<b>Pelvis</b>	<b>Back and Ribs</b>	<b>Neck</b>
<b>0 Very Poor</b>	Angular, skin tight. Very sunken rump. Deep cavity under tail	Skin tight over ribs. Very prominent and sharp backbone. Skin tight over ribs. Very prominent and sharp backbone.	Marked ewe neck. Narrow and slack at base.
<b>1 Poor</b>	Prominent pelvis and croup. Sunken rump but skin supple. Deep cavity under tail.	Ribs easily visible. Prominent backbone with sunken skin on either side	Ewe neck, narrow and slack base.
<b>2 Moderate</b>	Rump flat either side of back bone. Croup well defined, some fat. Slight cavity under tail.	Ribs just visible. Backbone covered but spines can be felt	Narrow but firm.
<b>3 Good</b>	Covered by fat and rounded. No gutter. Pelvis easily felt.	Ribs just covered and easily felt. No gutter along the back. Backbone well covered but spines can be felt.	No crest (except for stallions) firm neck.
<b>4 Fat</b>	Gutter to root of tail. Pelvis covered by fat. Need firm pressure to feel.	Ribs well covered – need pressure to feel. Slight crest.	Wide and firm.
<b>5 Very Fat</b>	Deep gutter to root of tail. Skin distended. Pelvis buried, cannot be felt.	Ribs buried, cannot be felt. Deep gutter along back. Back broad and flat.	Marked crest very wide and firm. Fold of fat.

(Based on the Carroll and Huntington Method)

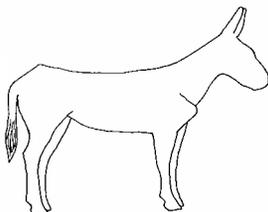
To obtain a body score, score the pelvis first, then adjust by half a point if it differs by one point or more to the back or neck.

## Appendix II – Body Condition Scoring – Donkeys

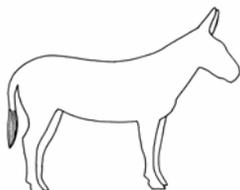
**1. POOR**



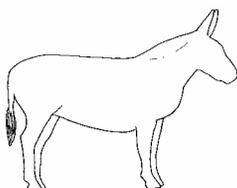
**2. MODERATE**



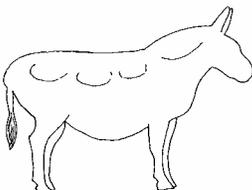
**3. IDEAL**



**4. FAT**



**5. OBESE**



## Appendix II – Body Condition Scoring – Donkeys

<b><u>C/S</u></b>	<b>NECK AND SHOULDERS</b>	<b>WITHERS</b>	<b>RIBS AND BELLY</b>	<b>BACK AND LOINS</b>	<b>HIND-QUARTERS</b>
1. POOR	Neck thin, all bones easily felt. Neck meets shoulder abruptly, shoulder bones felt easily, angular.	Dorsal spine of withers prominent and easily felt.	Ribs can be seen from a distance and felt with ease. Belly tucked up.	Backbone prominent, can feel dorsal and transverse processes easily.	Hip bones visible and felt easily (hock and pin bones). Little muscle cover. May be cavity under tail.
2. MODERATE	Some muscle development overlying bones. Slight step where neck meets shoulders.	Some cover over dorsal withers, spinous processes felt but not prominent.	Ribs not visible but can be felt with ease.	Dorsal and transverse processes felt with light pressure. Poor muscle development either side midline.	Poor muscle cover on hindquarters, hip bones felt with ease.
3. IDEAL	Good muscle development, bones felt under light cover of muscle/fat. Neck flows smoothly into shoulder, which is rounded.	Good cover of muscle/fat over dorsal spinous processes withers flow smoothly into back.	Ribs just covered by light layer of fat/muscle, ribs can be felt with light pressure. Belly firm with good muscle tone and flattish outline.	Cannot feel individual spinous or transverse processes. Muscle development either side of midline is good.	Good muscle cover in hindquarters, hip bones rounded in appearance, can be felt with light pressure.
4. FAT (show condition ?)	Neck thick, crest hard, shoulder covered in even fat layer.	Withers broad, bones felt with firm pressure.	Ribs dorsally only felt with firm pressure, ventral ribs may be felt more easily. Belly overdeveloped.	Can only feel dorsal and transverse processes with firm pressure. Slight crease along midline.	Hindquarters rounded, bones felt only with firm pressure. Fat deposits evenly placed.
5. OBESE	Neck thick, crest bulging with fat and may fall to one side. Shoulder rounded and bulging with fat.	Withers broad, unable to feel bones.	Large, often uneven fat deposits covering dorsal and possibly ventral aspect of ribs. Ribs not palpable. Belly pendulous in depth and width.	Back broad, unable to feel spinous or transverse processes. Deep crease along midline bulging fat either side.	Cannot feel hip bones, fat may overhang either side of tail head, fat often uneven and bulging.

Half scores can be assigned where donkeys fall between scores. Aged donkeys can be hard to condition score due to lack of muscle bulk and tone giving thin appearance dorsally with dropped belly ventrally, while overall condition may be reasonable.

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## Reporting cases of ill-treatment

If you see, or hear of, any equine in distress, report it at once. Be sure of your facts, and if possible, get a witness to support your statement. You need to know (if possible)

1. The owner's name and address. Alternatively the owner of the land on which the horse is kept.
2. The time(s) and date(s) when you saw the animal(s).
3. A description of the location - field, buildings, road, any landmarks, so that it will be easy to find.
4. A description of the animal with all-possible detail; colour, sex, approximate age and height, distinguishing marks etc. (eg. - "Chestnut mare, about 12.2hh, white star on face, white sock on off hind leg.")
5. The cause of your concern. (ie lameness, severely undernourished, over-ridden, unacceptable living conditions, lame, very thin, open wound above knee on near foreleg, bald patch on near shoulder etc.
6. A description of the people actually abusing an animal. Try to give an accurate description ("a man" or "two boys" is not sufficiently specific.)

Do **NOT** go on to private land without permission. **You** can be sued if wilful damage to any of the property can be proved. If you are seen touching the horse, an irate owner could try to sue you for causing it injury. If you should have any sort of accident on this land - such as the horse kicking you - **you** are liable, not the landowner. Investigations must be carried out with great care.

## **National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC)**

Founded in 1977, the National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) was set up to encourage equine welfare organisations to unite in their work and speak with one voice on welfare matters of concern and importance throughout the equine world.

Copies of this code can be downloaded from the NEWC website:

[www.newc.co.uk](http://www.newc.co.uk)