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EUTHANASIA

Horses are kept for many different reasons including athletic competition, breeding, pleasure riding and companionship. In return for companionship and performance, the owner is responsible for providing food, water, shelter, exercise, protection from illness and injury (as far as possible) and treatment when needed,. Another aspect of horse ownership, equally as important, is what needs to be done when the horse comes to the end of its life and either passes away or requires euthanasia.

What is euthanasia?

Euthanasia means “good death”. It is the humane and painless ending of a life.

When might my horse require euthanasia?

Many horses live well into their twenties and thirties. At some stage in their lives, the time may come when the effects of old age, disease or injury become so severely debilitating that a decision as to what is best for the horse must be made. You will know when your horse or pony is no longer enjoying life or the quality of life has deteriorated intolerably. Your veterinarian can advise you, based on previous knowledge and current examination of your horse. As an animal owner, your ultimate responsibility is to ensure that your horse does not suffer needlessly and is able to pass away with dignity. This is often a sad and traumatic time and it is worth giving some thought to the practicalities of dealing with this event before it actually occurs.



Sometimes, illness or injury will necessitate euthanasia on a horse. This situation usually occurs very suddenly and there is little time for planning. It is important to think ahead as to what your decisions might be in this situation.

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How is euthanasia performed?

The most common method of euthanasia is by lethal injection. The veterinarian gives the horse an intravenous injection of an anaesthetic agent. It is the same one used to sedate an animal for an operation, but because of the volume used, the horse becomes unconscious to such a degree that its heart and respiration stops and death quickly follows. Unconsciousness occurs within seconds of the injection, and the heart stops one to two minutes later. The whole procedure is very fast and the horse is completely unaware.

How do I dispose of my horse's carcass?

All horses, when they die, must be disposed of without delay, so it is important to plan ahead. In our area, commercial pickup is available at almost any time. The horse will go for rendering, or, for an additional fee, may be cremated. Burial is an option for some owners, but there are legal restrictions on burial in some areas, so check with your local authorities. Where a post-mortem examination is required (to determine why or how the horse died or when required for insurance purposes), it must be done without delay. If the horse is insured, the insurance company must be notified prior to euthanasia.

It is not easy to consider the passing of a cherished horse, but all owners have to accept the responsibility of this last act they can provide. With planning, it is a simple and straightforward procedure, although not without sorrow.