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Horse Protection Inspector Duties and Responsibilities

Last Modified:

In May 2024, APHIS published new Horse Protection regulations that eliminate the role of Designated Qualified Persons. The new regulations also relieve Horse Industry Organizations of their regulatory responsibilities. Effective February 1, 2026, only APHIS Veterinary Medical Officers and Horse Protection Inspectors (HPIs) may conduct inspections. This page describes the duties and responsibilities of an HPI.

The information on this page is intended solely for purposes of describing the general activities that HPIs perform pursuant to the Horse Protection Act (HPA) and its regulations. It does not replace or revise any existing laws or regulations. To the extent any information on this page is inconsistent with existing laws or regulations, the existing laws or regulations apply. APHIS reserves the right to change the information on this page at any time.

[View the HPA and Regulations](#)

Working an Event

An HPI will not generally or routinely delay or interrupt individual classes or performances at horse shows, horse exhibitions, or horse sales or auctions for the

purpose of examining horses but may do so in extraordinary situations. An extraordinary situation may include, but is not limited to, any of the following:

- Lack of proper facilities for inspection
- Refusal of management to cooperate with inspection efforts
- Reason to believe that failure to immediately perform inspection may result in the loss, removal, or masking of any evidence of a violation of the HPA or the regulations
- A request by management to perform such inspections

Conducting Physical Inspections

The HPI will physically inspect all Tennessee Walking Horses and racking horses entered for the purposes of being sold, auctioned, shown, or exhibited before they are sold, auctioned, shown, or exhibited. They will also inspect all Tennessee Walking Horses and racking horses placed first in their class or event at any horse show or horse exhibition.

HPIs will follow APHIS-approved inspection procedures when conducting a physical examination. They will observe horses in the warm-up ring and during actual performances whenever possible. They may also inspect any Tennessee Walking Horse or racking horse at any other time they deem necessary to determine whether it is in violation of the HPA or its regulations.

Minimum Inspection Procedures

- The HPI will inspect horses no more than three classes before they are to be shown, or no more than two classes before they are to be shown if the show has fewer than 150 horses.
- Each horse in the inspection area must be accompanied only by the person having immediate custody of or responsibility for the horse.
- Inspected horses must be held in a warm-up area that is monitored by event management. Horses may not leave the warm-up area before showing. Only the horse, the person in custody of or responsible for the horse, the trainer, the rider, the management representative, the HPI(s), and APHIS representatives are allowed in the warm-up area.

- The HPI will instruct the horse's custodian to control the horse by holding the reins approximately 18 inches from the bit shank.
- The HPI will not examine a horse if it is presented by the custodian in a manner that might cause the horse not to react to a HPI's examination, or if whips, cigarette smoke, or other actions or paraphernalia are used to distract a horse during examination. All such incidents shall be reported to the event management.
- The HPI will direct the horse's custodian to walk and turn the horse in a manner that allows the HPI to determine whether the horse exhibits signs of soreness as defined in the HPA or its regulations.
- The HPI will pick up the foot and examine the posterior (flexor) surface. The HPI shall apply digital pressure to the pocket (sulcus), including the bulbs of the heel, and continue the palpation to the medial and lateral surfaces of the pastern, being careful to observe the horse for responses to pain.
- While continuing to hold onto the pastern, the HPI will extend the foot and leg of the horse to examine the front (extensor) surfaces, including the coronary band.
- The HPI shall examine the rear limbs of all inspected horses after showing and may examine the rear limbs of any horse when they deem it necessary.
- The HPI will observe and/or examine all action devices, pads, and other equipment to assure that they comply with the regulations. They will weigh and measure all such equipment on horses examined post-event to ensure compliance with the limitations set forth in [§ 11.6 of the HPA regulations](#).
- The HPI may carry out additional inspection procedures as they deem necessary to determine whether the horse is sore within the meaning of the HPA or its regulations or is otherwise in violation of the HPA or its regulations.

Horses Found in Violation of the HPA or the Regulations

The HPI will inform the owner, trainer, exhibitor, or other person having immediate custody of or responsibility for any horse allegedly found to be in violation of the HPA or its regulations before the horse is released from the inspection area. They will also immediately report to event management any horse which, in their opinion, is sore or otherwise in violation of the HPA or its regulations. They will make this report, whenever possible, before the event class or exhibition involving the horse

has begun or before the horse is offered for sale or auction.

The HPI will provide the APHIS-approved inspection report to the custodian after identifying any horse as noncompliant with the HPA or the regulations. They will also submit copies of all issued inspection reports to APHIS within 5 business days after the event concludes.

Contact Us

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