

Animal Care: Safeguarding the Welfare of Animals

Animals are a vital part of our world. As USDA's guardian of animal welfare, Animal Care (AC) within the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) administers two laws that seek to ensure the humane handling of animals: the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and the Horse Protection Act (HPA). The AWA requires that minimum levels of care be provided to certain animals used in research or exhibition, sold as pets at the wholesale level, or transported in commerce. The HPA prohibits the practice of soring, which is the application of chemical or mechanical irritants to a horse's pastern to enhance its gait.

The Animal Care Program

AC's mission is to provide leadership in establishing acceptable standards of humane animal care and treatment and to monitor and achieve compliance through inspections, education, and cooperative efforts.

AC is headquartered in Riverdale, MD, and has regional offices in Raleigh, NC, Fort Worth, TX, and Fort Collins, CO. Most AC employees are either veterinary medical officers (VMO's) or AC inspectors. A limited number are administrative personnel. All the VMO's are graduates of veterinary medical colleges, and many were veterinarians in private practice earlier in their careers. While not veterinarians, the AC inspectors have extensive knowledge about the care and handling of animals. This knowledge comes from both coursework and practical hands-on experience.

The Animal Welfare Act

The AWA requires that minimum standards of care and treatment be provided for most warmblooded animals bred for commercial sale, used in research, transported commercially, or exhibited to the public. Covered animals include those exhibited in zoos, circuses, and marine mammal facilities, as well as pets transported on commercial airlines. The AWA also prohibits staged dogfights, bear and raccoon baiting, and similar animal-fighting ventures. The law was passed in 1966 and amended in 1970, 1976, 1985, and 1990.

AC conducts randomly scheduled, unannounced inspections to ensure that all regulated facilities are complying with the AWA. If an inspection reveals

deficiencies in meeting the AWA standards and regulations, the inspector instructs the facility to correct the problems within a given timeframe or, in serious cases of neglect or suffering, recommends formal legal actions. If follow-up inspections reveal that minor deficiencies have remained uncorrected, the inspector documents the facility's deficiencies and considers possible legal action. Such action could result in fines up to \$2,750 per violation and/or license suspensions or revocations.

The Horse Protection Act

The HPA prohibits sored horses from participating in exhibitions, sales, shows, or auctions. The HPA also prohibits drivers from transporting sored horses to compete in shows. The law was first passed in 1970 and amended in 1976.

To enforce the HPA, AC oversees the Designated Qualified Person (DQP) program. DQP's, who are trained and licensed by USDA-certified horse industry organizations to detect sored horses, typically have extensive experience in equine health and husbandry. DQP's are responsible for barring from shows any horses that do not meet the HPA standards. To ensure that the DQP's continue to adhere to HPA standards, AC personnel conduct randomly scheduled, unannounced inspections at horse shows and sales.

For those who violate the HPA, APHIS can impose criminal or civil charges. If convicted, violators can spend up to 2 years in prison, receive penalties of up to \$5,000, and be disqualified for 1 or more years from the right to show, exhibit, or sell horses through auction sales. Trainers can be disqualified for life.

Additional Information

For additional information about AC's programs and services, contact us at:

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