

MS Listening Session, 3/29/12 – Sheryl Crawford, S.H.O.W. HIO Judging Committee Member

Question # 4: How can the industry reconcile its inherent competition aspect with ensuring compliance with the Horse Protection Act?

One initiative the industry has taken is instilling a higher level of responsibility on judges that officiate horse shows. Dr. Gipson had suggested to SHOW that judging was the last element of the inspection process and as a result, a judging panel was formed about seventeen months ago at the S.H.O.W. HIO. One of the objectives of this committee is to remove any “bad image” horses from the show ring. We use two areas to accomplish this task: 1) Educating the judges on what constitutes a “bad image” and 2) Disciplinary actions for judges that fail to excuse such horses. For judging purposes, a “bad image” is not an automatic or even final indication of HPA compliance.

For judging purposes, a “bad image” may or may not be an indication of HPA compliance. For all show divisions from halter, pleasure, performance, or versatility, a horse could display non-standard characteristics in which a judge may deem that it is in the best interest of the industry and general public to remove the horse from competition. The committee is not concerned with whether such displays are from rider error, over or under biting a horse, too much or too little weight, track conditions and so forth. Our judges have guidelines for non-standard performance and requirements for eliminating a horse from the ring. The guidelines encourage a judge to tie well balanced and good image horses and that does indirectly affect the “competition aspect” of showing.

Since horses excused (voluntarily or mandated by the judge) are required to report back to inspection, the DQP and or/VMO have another opportunity to check for HPA compliance.

Question #5: What can USDA do now (and in the future) to ensure compliance?

In the last few years, the industry has initiated more elective and pro-active measures to ensure HPA compliance, as well as improve our industry and public image. The formation of the judging committee is one example of the USDA’s effective communication in working with an HIO. We also have a conference in June that will focus on education in a number of areas such as training skills, communication, ethics, equine welfare and the HPA. Licensed trainers will receive certificates of attendance for their participation at this forum which will correlate with a program being developed within the Walking Horse Trainers Association (WHTA). Dr. Cezar and AAEP representatives were helpful in initiating this idea with WHTA representatives. We appreciate the USDA presenting at this conference and supporting our efforts to improve the TWH industry. The USDA’s participation in education and effective communication with the show horse exhibitors are major factors in ensuring compliance.

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