

The Federal Government plays a key role in ensuring that animals covered under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and the Horse Protection Act (HPA) and used in regulated activities are provided humane care and treatment. The Federal responsibility for this important work rests with the Animal Care (AC) program, which is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). As USDA's guardian of animal welfare, AC makes sure that proper care is provided to most warmblooded animals used in research or exhibition, sold as pets at the wholesale level, or transported in commerce. Under the HPA, AC works to prevent the practice of



Through unannounced inspections, Animal Care VMOs and ACIs enforce regulations related to humane care and treatment of animals.

“soring.” Soring is a procedure that entails applying chemical or mechanical irritants to a horse’s pastern to enhance its gait—a practice typically used on certain gaited horses as a cruel shortcut to proper training.

AC in Brief

The AC program employs professionals with a range of scientific, technical, and administrative skills to accomplish its mission and facilitate enforcement of the AWA and HPA. These professionals are veterinarians, animal care inspectors, computer specialists, program specialists, and other administrative and program support personnel.

Enforcement of the AWA and HPA is accomplished by field-based employees who are strategically located throughout the 50 States and Territories. They are either veterinary medical officers (VMOs) or animal care inspectors (ACIs). Some specialize in the care of various species or in the areas of nutrition, research, or transportation. All VMOs are graduates of a veterinary medical college, and many have been



Animal Care inspectors ensure that handlers and trainers meet professionally recognized standards for experience and training.

private-practice veterinarians prior to joining AC. ACIs have education in the biological sciences and/or extensive experience in the care and handling of animals.

The Animal Welfare Act

The AWA requires that minimum standards of humane 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 may include those exhibited in zoos, circuses, and marine mammal facilities; used for research; or destined for the commercial pet trade. Pets transported on commercial airlines (U.S. or foreign) as baggage or cargo are also covered under the AWA.

VMOs and ACIs conduct randomly scheduled, unannounced inspections to ensure that all regulated facilities are in compliance with the standards and regulations of the AWA. If an inspection reveals deficiencies in meeting the AWA standards or regulations, the inspector either instructs the facility



Safe and careful handling of animals in transit on a commercial carrier is assured through Animal Welfare Act regulations.



Animal Care's inspectors interact with licensees and registrants on a regular basis to provide education and ensure compliance.

to correct the problems within a given timeframe or, in serious cases of negligence or suffering, recommends formal legal action. Such action could result in immediate confiscations, fines up to \$2,500 per violation, and/or license suspension or revocation.

The Horse Protection Act

The HPA prohibits owners and trainers from showing, exhibiting, or selling sored horses in exhibitions, sales, shows, or auctions. This law also prohibits drivers from transporting sored horses to compete in shows.

To enforce the HPA, AC professionals perform randomly scheduled, unannounced inspections at horse shows and sales. AC personnel also exercise oversight of the Designated Qualified Person (DQP) program. DQPs are individuals trained and licensed by USDA-certified horse industry organizations to detect sored horses. DQPs typically have extensive experience in equine health and husbandry. They are responsible for barring from shows any horses that



Horses at shows, sales, and auctions are inspected under the Horse Protection Act to eliminate the practice of soring.

do not meet the HPA standards. To ensure that the DQPs continue to adhere to HPA standards, AC personnel evaluate the DQPs' inspection technique and conclusions at some shows and sales.

For those who violate the HPA, AC 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 selling horses through auction sales and showing or exhibiting horses.

Public Relations

USDA is committed to enforcing the AWA and HPA. In addition to conducting regular inspections, AC will perform inspections in response to public concerns about the conditions of regulated facilities. Individuals are also encouraged to inform AC about unregulated facilities that may require licenses or registration.

Many State and local governments have animal welfare laws of their own. The public is encouraged to work with State and local officials and local humane organizations as well as Federal officials to help reduce inhumane treatment of animals.

AC seeks to educate the public and create a cooperative relationship with licensed and registered entities, the animal protection community, and other Federal and State agencies. To accomplish this goal, AC conducts workshops regarding minimum care standards as outlined in the AWA and HPA.

For More Information

On the AWA, HPA, regulations/standards, and workshops:

www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare

On licensing and registration:

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About APHIS' Animal Care Program

