

Policy: 622.2
Effective: 1 December 2011
Revised: October 2011
Subject: Harness Racing Heat Policy
Reference: *Harness Animal Welfare Committee Meeting - 12 February 2009*
Regulatory Review Panel – 9 February 2011
HRNSW Board Meeting – 26 October 2011

HARNESS RACING HEAT POLICY

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This policy is in place to protect the welfare of horses and minimise the effects on participants during hot summer days at all New South Wales harness racing tracks.
- 1.2 Clause 2.1 was amended and clause 2.2 was added to the original Policy after the Policy was used in early 2011. The updates occurred, though were not covered. All other clauses were re-numbered accordingly.
- 1.3 Clause 2.1 has been further amended in October 2011 to now make reference of the wet bulb globe temperature. The wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) is a composite temperature used to estimate the effect of temperature, humidity, wind speed (wind chill) and solar radiation on humans. It is used by industrial hygienists, athletes, and the military to determine appropriate exposure levels to high temperatures.
- 1.4 The Policy is now far more detailed and specific and is divided into three parts, the first relates to trainers, the second to Clubs/Stewards actions on race day and the third relates to the welfare of horses.

2. TRAINERS POLICY

- 2.1 At race meetings where the Bureau of Meteorology has forecast, within 24 hours of the meeting, that the temperature at the venue where the meeting is to be held or the area where the horse is trained, that the forecast or ambient temperature is 38°C or above, or the wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) shade is 28°C or above, a Trainer may, before 9.00am on the day of the meeting, seek permission from the Stewards to withdraw the horse from its engagement without a scratching penalty applied.
- 2.2 A horse may be withdrawn for heat stress after the official scratching time with the permission of the Chief Steward of the meeting provided the trainer can satisfy that travel to the track may have a detrimental effect on the well being of the horse.
- 2.3 A horse may be withdrawn for heat stress on arrival at the track by order of the Steward, in consultation with the On Course Veterinarian, Stewards and the Trainer. Any penalty incurred would be at the discretion of the Stewards acting on the advice of the Veterinarian.
- 2.4 If the climatic conditions are excessive on race day, all horses that have been floated should be checked by a Veterinarian on arrival at the track.

- 2.5 At the request of a Trainer or their representative, any other horse shall also be subject to pre-race Veterinary inspection.
- 2.6 Horses may not be required to parade and identification procedures shall be conducted in the stalls.
- 2.7 Horses may be sent out onto the track for their preliminary at the discretion of Stewards in lieu of normal 10 minute requirement.
- 2.8 Any Trainer who has any concerns regarding their horse's condition, post race, should immediately notify Stewards to enable Veterinary assistance to be available.

3. CLUB/STEWARDS POLICY

- 3.1 This policy will apply on all race days where the forecast or ambient temperature is 38°C or above, or the wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) shade is 28°C or above.
- 3.2 Stewards must take advice from the official veterinarian(s) in considering whether to proceed or modify the program for that race meeting.
- 3.3 Modification of a race program might include the advancement or delay in a schedule if it appears likely that extreme weather conditions might ease or be avoided.
- 3.4 Should the Stewards determine to continue the racing program, they may instruct that:
 - a) An additional official veterinarian be provided
 - b) Additional equipment be provided by the race club to assist the comfort of horses
 - c) An official veterinarian be available post-race at a position for drivers to report concerns regarding a horse
 - d) Drivers, if they become concerned at the condition of their drive post-race, proceed to the official veterinarian positioned on the track
 - e) A specific air-conditioned stall be set aside for recovery purposes
 - f) The minimum period prior to the race for horses to be required on course may be reduced
 - g) Pre- and post-race parades be amended as directed and the period horses are required in the milling area minimised
 - h) Where possible horses should be stabled out of the sun and in areas that are breezy.
 - i) Ensure adequate wash bays and hoses are available to enable rapid post-race cooling of horses.
 - j) Ensure adequate horse drinking water is available.
 - k) Race club officials should be informed to have ice, water, scrapers, sponges, towels and extra water hoses available. Race club staff should provide large bins and ensure that these are continually stocked with bags of ice and water to assist in the cooling of horses.
 - l) Ensure the swabbing stall interior is as cool as possible, by hosing the roof, allowing adequate ventilation and/or providing fans/air-conditioning.
 - m) Tie-up stalls equipped with water misters and/or fans enable horses to cool down throughout the day.
 - n) Evaporative cooling, particularly sweating, is the most important means of dissipation of body heat for the exercising horse. The liberal application of cold

water in shaded, well ventilated places will greatly assist the processes which enable horses to lose excessive body heat on hot days.

- 3.5 Horses can be assisted in cooling down after racing in hot weather by maximising the efficiency of evaporative cooling:
- a) "Wet and Walk" as water evaporates from the skin it removes body heat causing the horse to cool. Increasing air flow over the horse's skin surface, by walking in shady, breezy areas, improves evaporation rates.
 - b) Horses may need to be hosed and scraped several times in between walking. Scraping of excess water from the coat stops the water acting as an insulating barrier and aids evaporation.
 - c) Bucketing or sponging ice cold water over the horse assists in the recovery of heat-affected horses.
 - d) In very humid and wind-still conditions, it may be difficult with the above methods for sweat and water to evaporate quickly enough for adequate body cooling. In these circumstances the use of air-conditioned stalls (which provide cool and dry air) and/or the use of fans (to improve air flow over the horse's skin surface) should be made available.
 - e) Horses should be allowed to drink as much fresh, clean water of ambient temperature as they require after racing.
 - f) Horses must be allowed sufficient time to adequately cool down before being floated back to their stables.
- 3.6 The Official Veterinarian(s) will scrutinise all horses:
- a) Upon arrival on course, in particular horses identified as having travelled in excess of two hours to attend the meeting. Any horse observed to be showing signs of discomfort pre-race as a result of the hot/humid conditions should have its rectal temperature taken. If a horse is observed with an elevated rectal temperature pre-race (in excess of 38.5° C) it should be monitored and consideration be given regarding its suitability to race
 - b) Detained in the swabbing area (either pre- or post-race) to monitor horses that are sweating excessively or appearing distressed during the sampling procedure
 - c) Immediately post-race, in particular for any horse where its driver becomes concerned about its condition
 - d) Subsequent to the race to ensure all horses have recovered appropriately to permit travel. No horse may leave the course without the approval of the official veterinarian
- 3.7 The Official Veterinarian(s) will also closely monitor all horses for signs of heat stress:
- a) In the tie-up stall area prior to presentation in the parade ring
 - b) In the parade ring pre-race
 - c) On arrival at the milling area prior to the start
 - d) On return to the stables post-race
 - e) While in the swabbing area (pre or post-race)
- 3.8 If the official veterinarian is concerned about a horse's condition pre-race, they shall immediately report their concerns to the Stewards.

- 3.9 Any horse found to be exhibiting signs of heat stress will be given appropriate treatment.

Appropriate treatment shall include:

- a) Repeated application of cool water to the entire body of the horse, followed by scraping of excess water from the horse
 - b) Walking the horse in a breezy, shaded area between bouts of hosing,
 - c) Oral and/or intravenous fluid therapy if indicated
 - d) Corticosteroid anti-inflammatory treatment if indicated
 - e) Sedative drugs if indicated
 - f) Use of air-conditioned stall if available
 - g) Use of forced ventilation if available
 - h) Use of ice-water soaked towels applied to the horse's body and changed frequently as towels heat up
- 3.10 The official veterinarian should have an adequate supply of relevant treatments on hand for emergency use.
- 3.11 Race clubs must ensure adequate running water is immediately available to thoroughly and repeatedly wet affected animals in order to maximise conductive/evaporative cooling. An adequate number of hoses should be provided for this purpose in the parade ring and the race day stalls by the Club conducting the meeting. They must ensure that all relevant hoses are connected, have adequate water pressure, and are manned by experienced personnel in the parade ring.
- 3.12 The Chairman of Stewards acting at any race meeting has the responsibility of obtaining the weather forecast conditions prior to the meeting and monitoring the New South Wales Thermal Comfort Observations as provided on the BOM website <http://www.bom.gov.au/products/IDN65179.shtml> throughout the meeting.
- 3.13 The Chairman of Stewards, race club official and licensees will take such action and provide such assistance as is necessary to ensure that the official veterinarian can properly fulfil their duties in accordance with this policy.
- 3.14 The Chairman of Stewards may issue directions to race club officials and licensees to properly give effect to this policy.

4. HORSE WELFARE INFORMATION POLICY

- 4.1 Horses possess an effective cooling mechanism, which relies to a large extent on the evaporation of sweat from the skin. As sweat and water molecules evaporate from the skin these molecules absorb and remove body heat causing the horse to cool.
- 4.2 Occasionally, when there is an imbalance in the amount of body heat generated and heat able to be lost to the environment, a small proportion of horses show signs of heat stress or heat stroke. Metabolic heat syndrome after exercise is most likely to be seen on days when both ambient temperature and relative humidity are high, and wind speeds are low or absent. These conditions favour build up of body heat load and reduce shedding of body heat load to the environment.

- 4.3 Signs of heat stress include:
- a) rapid shallow breathing (panting) with flared nostrils
 - b) staggering gait/weakness
 - c) agitated and distressed appearance
 - d) impulsive kicking with hind limbs or striking out with front limbs
 - e) occasionally collapse
- 4.4 A horse's susceptibility to heat stress is not influenced solely by prevailing weather conditions. Other risk factors for horses include:
- a) travelling long distances prior to competition
 - b) withholding drinking water prior to racing (this is not a recommended practice in hot weather)
 - c) horses with an excitable temperament
 - d) horses not acclimatised to local weather conditions
 - e) horses that are first starters, resuming from a spell, or early in their training program
 - f) horses that sweat excessively, or do not sweat adequately ("dry-coated")
- 4.5 In the event of a trainer being concerned by the manner in which a horse is coping with the prevailing weather conditions before its race (agitation, panting and/or excessive sweating) an approach may be made to the Stewards seeking to withdraw the horse from the race, whereby the Stewards may seek the opinion of the Official Veterinarian before considering such an application.
- 4.6 The Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM), through its website, provides regularly updated weather information including thermal comfort and heat stress indicators using a calculated estimate of wet bulb global temperature (WBGT). True WBGT takes into account measured values for temperature, humidity, wind speed and solar radiation. The WBGT estimate that is provided by BOM uses actual measurements of temperature, and humidity combined with estimates of wind speed and solar radiation in calculating WBGT (the estimate assumes a moderately high solar radiation level and light wind conditions).