

Euthanasia and Disposal of Horses

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Introduction

A critical situation for us and/or our horse is real cause for concern and maybe sadness. It is not a time for panic. It is not a time to fall apart. Neither of these reactions is helpful. This is not a talk about first aid, but a couple of considerations are worth mentioning. A sick horse, no matter how bad he looks, may get better given enough time. A down horse should be moved into a comfortable position, propped up on its chest, moved every hour so it is not lying on one rear leg constantly, and given some time. If the down horse refuses to allow itself to be propped up and prefers to lie out flat that is a grave sign. A horse refusing to use one leg over a period of 2 hours or more is very bad sign. Usually though a broken leg is obvious.

Procedure

The only practical method for a non-veterinarian to humanely euthanize a horse is to shoot it with gun. A 22 caliber pistol with long rifle bullets is quite adequate for this procedure. Any caliber larger than this will work well but the larger and more powerful the projectile fired the bigger the mess you will create. To be humane the shot must be carefully placed in the right place. If you are not familiar with handling a gun take a class and practice. A pistol is more convenient to carry, but remember the shorter the barrel the less accurate is your firearm and the easier it is to accidentally shoot in a direction you did not intend. Cross tying the horse's head will prevent it from moving at the wrong moment and spoiling your aim. Be careful to see that the horse is not lined up with something that should not be shot if the bullet goes clear through. If you are shaking stop, unload your gun, collect yourself, aim at something else and pull the trigger a few times. Then aim at the horse and pull the trigger. Then reload and slowly and carefully take aim and slowly squeeze the trigger. To prepare to aim at the right spot use your finger to draw an imaginary line from the base of one ear to the middle of the opposite eye. Draw another line from the other ear to its opposite eye. Where these lines cross is the right spot to place your shot. Better yet draw your lines with a felt tip pen or with thin strips of duct tape or adhesive tape. Shoot from directly in front of the head. If the horse is standing, position yourself far enough away so the horse will not fall on you. A shot placed in this manner will render the horse instantly insensitive. But, all parts of the horse do not die at the same time. Unconscious reflexes may cause the horse to stiffen out, paddle its limbs, and gasp for air. All movement but gasping should stop in a few seconds; the gasping may continue as long as five minutes. If any of these movements continue longer than this shoot the horse again.

Disposal

Now that your horse is dead what is to be done with the body? LNT? In the back country large wild animals die regularly and one more carcass does not make a significant impact on the environment. Use good judgment. If your horse can walk at all before putting it down get it well off the trail and away from water. If your horse goes down in the middle of the trail, in camp, or near a lake or stream do what you can to move it to a better place. Two reasonably strong people can roll a dead horse over and over to move it. One person pulling one way on the dead horse's head and another person pulling the opposite way on its tail can swivel the horse around. A rope tied to a tree, passed through the dead animal's halter and back to and around another tree creates a pulley system that will give you considerable mechanical advantage. If your horse is in a bad place and you just cannot move it, leave it and go for help. The local USFS ranger is often quite willing to help out with a situation of this sort. They really prefer that such a situation be reported quickly rather than discover a rotting horse in a bad place. The USFS has found that dynamite disposes of a carcass quickly. This all applies to trails on the Pilchuck Tree Farm.

At your home place dead animal disposal requires other solutions. It is against the law to leave a dead animal out on a farm for more than 24 hours. On site burial is legal in rural areas over the whole state. The animal must be covered with at least 3 feet of earth (4 feet in Snohomish County). The burial site must be more than 100 feet from a well, stream, or other surface water, and in an area not subject to water overflow. A backhoe is the best instrument for digging a hole, but I have buried 2 horses using a small tractor with a front end loader. The technique is to make a hole 20 or 30 yards long so that you can drive into and out of it on a gentle slope and get either the center or one end deep enough.

Equipment operators available for animal burial:

Ground Contact Inc., Heath Giaudrone	425-870-7575 or 425-263-2075
George Brown	360-629-4368
Ray Bentley	425-330-4476

Animal pick up services:

Tri County	360-815-4219
QAR (7 day pick up within 24 hours)	253-847-7220
Rawhide	253-686-7732

Cremation services: (includes pick up)

Steve Morris Co.	206-784-4055
Petland	800-738-5119