

Horses in San Francisco/Urban City Environments

Should horse riding be offered in an urban setting?

- Noise, busy roads, and urban activity increase the risk a horse will startle and cause an injury accident. Horses are flight animals.
- Inexperienced riders do not have the skills to reassure a horse before it bolts or handle a horse when it does bolt or startle. An inexperienced rider will be at higher risk of an injury accident.
- There is always a significant risk of injury when a person falls from a horse, even an experienced rider, due to the size and power of the animal.
- Horses who are ill or in physical pain are more likely to be reactive. There are many reasons a horse can be in pain, from ill-fitting saddles to insufficient water, to arthritis or other conditions that come with advanced age.
- Horses who are emotionally stressed are also more likely to be reactive. There are many reasons a horse may be experiencing emotional stress, such as acclimating to a new location, being separated from its herd, feeling confusion, anger, or fear coming from a rider or handler.
- The horse industry in the United States is largely unregulated. There are few certifications or qualifications to offer assurance that an outfitter or its animals meet any animal welfare or safety standards.
- There are other public health considerations related to horse keeping, such as urine and manure management. A typical horse produces 2.7 gallons of urine and 35-50 pounds of manure per day. Urine creates ammonia vapors. Manure attracts breeding flies and other insects.
- There are no other large cities in the United States that offer horse riding to the public as a recreational activity within urban public parks.
 - There is no public horse riding in Manhattan, New York City.
 - There is no public horse riding in Chicago.
 - Los Angeles ended pony rides in Griffith Park in 2022 due to public outcry about working conditions for the animals.

Why might horse riding be offered in a public park?

- Recreation
- Entertainment
- Programming for underserved members of the public (veterans, at-risk youth)
- Revenue
- Public Relations

What is required to ensure animal welfare?

[UC Davis Minimum Standards of Horse Care in the State of California](#) details the basic care that needs to be provided, including applicable state law. It is a minimum standard, not necessarily a best care standard. This includes:

- Adequate diet, approximately 30 lbs. of hay, split into 2-3 daily feedings, with supplements as needed
- Hay kept free of manure, urine, dust, mold, toxins, and weeds

- Continuous access to clean water
- Maintain good weight and body condition per veterinary standard body condition scoring system
- Any enclosure where a horse is primarily kept must be of sufficient size to enable the horse to comfortably stand up, turn around and lie down.
- A horse must be able to lay comfortably flat on its side in a safe environment for regular REM sleep, for proper brain function.
- Excessive feces, urine, mud or other waste products must not accumulate within the enclosure.
- Ventilation in enclosed areas must be sufficient to prevent the accumulation of toxic ammonia from urine.
- Enclosures, shelters, and turnouts should be free of all hazards.
- Horses confined to a stall must be given exercise daily.
- Confined horses should have a turnout area for a period of free exercise and socialization in a friendly group 4-5 times per week.
- Horses should not be forced to stand tied for more than two hours at a time.
- A clean, safe area where horses can be groomed, shod, and provided health care services should be kept apart from horse enclosures.
- Flies, mosquitoes, midges and other insects attracted to manure and standing water can transmit diseases to horses and humans. A program to monitor and minimize the presence of insects in horse areas needs to be implemented.
- Hoof care should be provided on a regular schedule, typically every 6-8 weeks.
- Vaccinations and deworming for intestinal parasites should be provided on a regular schedule, per veterinary advice. Vaccinations are typically annual.
- Teeth should be checked and floated on a regular schedule, per veterinary advice. (Typically, once a year or every 2 years, depending on age.)
- Horses should be thoroughly groomed and checked for minor skin conditions and cuts at least two times per week.
- Veterinary care for emergency situations should be provided as soon as possible, within no more than 2-3 hours.

Working horses should be give additional welfare considerations, for example:

- A requirement that the named permittees be on site daily to supervise employees, horses, programs, and all business operations.
- A requirement that the named permittees provide a written manual for processes, procedures, and checklists for daily operations and programs, with certification that all employees have been trained and can support this work manual.
- Documented list of all horses in the work string, identifying each individual by name, breed, color, gender, and markings, with a photo.
- Each individual horse should have a microchip or inalterable number applied to them via a frieze brand or other humane method, to ensure accurate identification of each individual horse by animal officers.

- Each enclosure clearly labeled with the name of the horse who resides inside.
- Two years of veterinary records for each horse, well-maintained, and kept on site, and readily provided upon request. This includes vaccinations, hoof care, and any other veterinary services provided.
- A schedule for when horses will work and rest - i.e. two hours then one hour off, with a maximum number of hours work per day.
- Regular, unannounced welfare checks, for body condition, back and body pain, open sores, lameness, and cribbing or other signs of emotional distress in each horse, by officers experienced in monitoring equine health and fitness for work. Records kept and publicly posted showing results of these checks.
- A routine check on equipment soundness, such as if each saddle and bridle being used are in good working condition and well fit to the horse.
- A desensitization checklist of scenarios for each horse, for officers to observe how each horse in work responds to stimuli that is likely to be encountered in a busy public park - bicycle racing by, car horns, leaf blowers, kids running and shouting, etc. Horses that fail must be taken out of work and put in a program of training and subsequent re-evaluation.
- Limits on working conditions related to weather conditions (heat, rain, smoke in the air, etc.)
- Patrol of areas where horses will be living and working, to detect and remove safety hazards (broken gates, loose wires, fallen branches, etc.)
- An on-call veterinary clinic within 2 hours of the facility, able to respond to serious emergencies 24/7.
- A readily available incident report form available to the public to submit concerns and observations.
- A required process and form for permittees to report all injuries and accidents to horses and riders to the permitting agency within 1 working day of occurrence. Failure to do so means the immediate stop of work and suspension of permit.
- A requirement that no horse on the worklist will be moved off property without notice to animal control and the permitting agency within 24 hours, detailing why and where the horse was moved.
- A requirement that no horse on the work list will be shipped to auction or kill lot.

Staff and Handler Training

- Training for those who work with and care for the horses. For example, PATH International requires certification for primary handlers working at PATH qualified facilities: <https://pathintl.org/certification/ctri/>. This includes a written test and a horse handling/riding test. Uncertified volunteers at a facility can work alongside, under the supervision of certified instructors.
- Hands on basic equestrian training for park rangers, to assist with facility inspections and in case of an emergency, such as a loose horse in the park. For example, the Marin Horse Council provides this one-day training to Marin County Open Space rangers.
- Certification of animal control officer for equine welfare expertise.
- Designation of an employee of the permitting agency, or other City authority, to assist with enforcement.