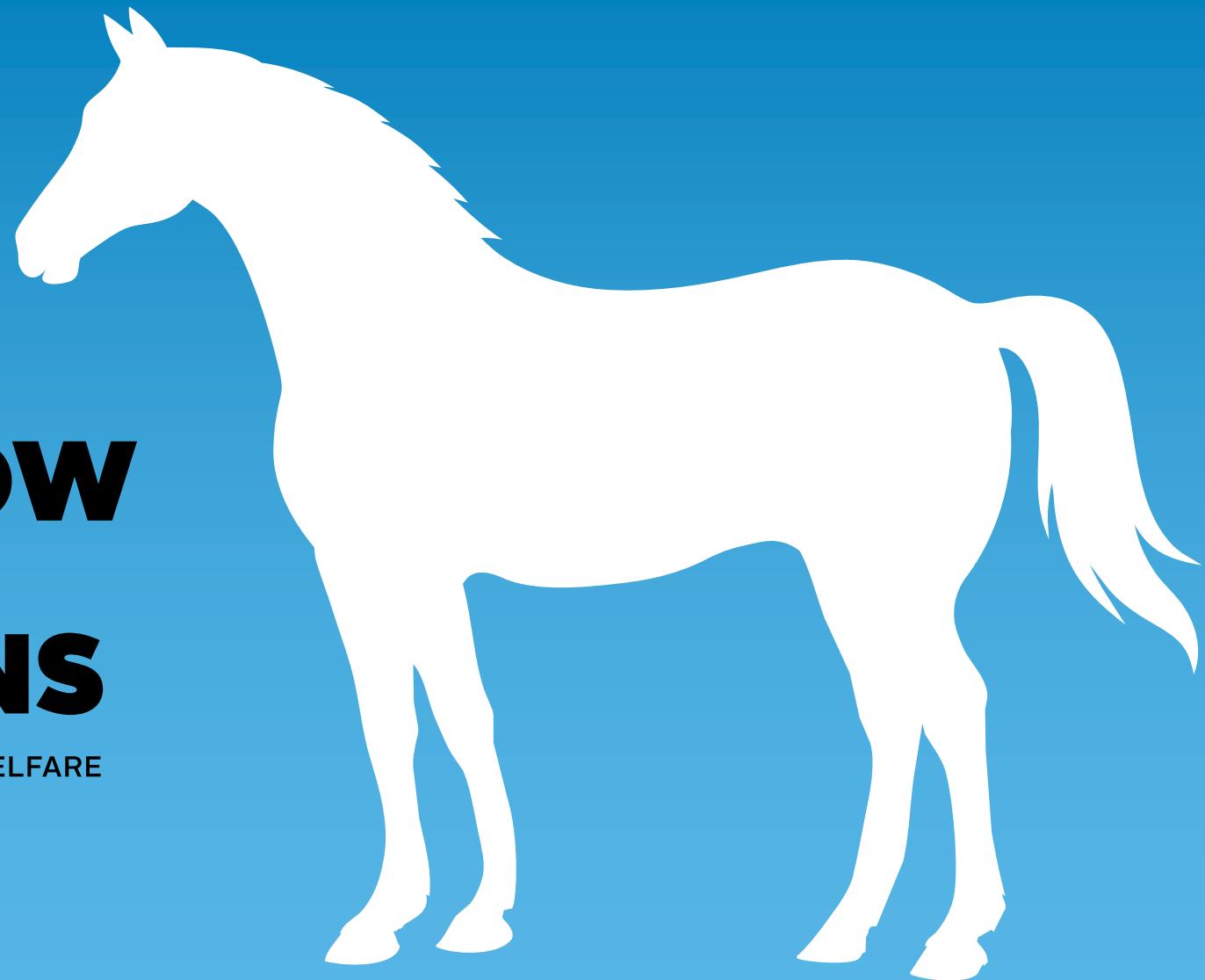


KNOW THE SIGNS

USEF HORSE WELFARE





OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE

Horse Welfare Guidelines

A Common Sense Approach for All Horses and All Disciplines



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE

INTRODUCTION

Horses are our valued partners in sport and in life. They are sentient beings with feelings and emotions. Ensuring horses are treated with care and respect is paramount.

Our goal is to always achieve a trusting, harmonious cooperation between horse and human. With any relationship, conflicts and miscommunications can happen. How these situations are handled is a true test of the knowledge, skill, and self awareness of every horse person.

While USEF rules, regulations, processes, and officials are in place to protect the horse, we all must safeguard the well being and trust of our horses.

*Thank you to the German Federation for allowing us to use their research.
Note: some descriptors have been slightly edited for U.S. purposes.*





OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE USEF HORSE WELFARE GUIDELINES

This all starts with a mutual understanding of the distinction between what is horse friendly, what may require attention, and what may be considered unethical treatment of a horse.

It is important that everyone have the same understanding of: What is acceptable? When is it time to take a break? When is it time to say something about what you're seeing? When do official warnings and penalties come into play?

To help all of us understand the path forward, we looked to a signpost that we are all familiar with – the stoplight – Green is horse friendly, yellow is cautionary, and red is unacceptable or not okay.



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE TERMINOLOGY

GREEN

Horse Friendly

The horse appears happy, willing, and content.

The connection between horse and human is harmonious and in sync.

YELLOW

Cautionary

Actions that cause you to pause and question whether they are acceptable.

Some actions may be acceptable for a very short period of time but may escalate to mistreatment if pressure or conflict increases in intensity.

RED

Unacceptable OR Not Okay

Actions that make you think, "This is not okay."

Actions that make you immediately think, "This behavior must stop."

Sometimes athletes can be acting in the red zone without even realizing it - these situations may be resolved by a licensed official interrupting the training, discussing the issue, and providing a verbal warning.

Note: These guidelines are intended to educate and be preventative in nature.



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE WAY OF RIDING or TRAINING

GREEN

Horse Friendly

- Harmonious and in sync
- Natural carriage for the breed
- Understanding and sensitive
- Confident and consistent
- Correct application of the aids

Understandable and respectful of the horse

YELLOW

Cautionary

- Forceful use of the athlete's aids or techniques
- Increasingly strong backwards or "sawing" with the reins/bit
- Repeated restriction of the head and neck with reins or equipment
- Improper use of the whip and spurs

RED

Unacceptable OR Not Okay

- Aggressive behavior or anger towards the horse
- Inappropriate emotional outbreaks
- Using techniques deliberately aimed against or to punish the horse
- Continuously restricting head and neck posture with hyperflexion
- Rough and incorrect use of aids
- Indications of horse's discomfort including repeated bucking, rearing, bolting, or kicking in response to athletes' aids
- Practices to intentionally induce fear or intimidation
- Excessive lunging
- Misuse or excessive use of the whip



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE

HORSE MOVEMENT AND APPEARANCE

GREEN

Horse Friendly

- Regularity of movement, supple, well-balanced
- Evenly paced gaits and stride
- Forward, positive demeanor
- Relaxed ears, attentive and soft eye

YELLOW

Cautionary

- Insecurity, stress, or obvious tension in the movement and/or eyes
- Lackluster or dull gaits due to fatigue
- Exhibiting tiredness and strain
- Excessive foaming sweat due to discomfort or stress
- Excessive tail swishing or pinning of ears due to distress

RED

Unacceptable OR Not Okay

- Lameness
- Repeated bucking, rearing, bolting or kicking in response to athlete's aids
- Constant, excessive head shaking due to resistance of the aids
- Continuously repeating significant resistance (e.g. rearing, spinning, backing up, etc.)
- Consistent and extreme faltering in the gaits
- Profuse and lathered sweating
- Exhaustion



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE HEAD-NECK POSITION

GREEN

Horse Friendly

- The horse's face in front of or at the vertical
- Natural carriage for the breed
- Momentarily deeper head-neck posture with the horse's face slightly behind the vertical
- In extended posture forwards and/or downwards
- On the bit
- On long or loose reins

YELLOW

Cautionary

- Briefly restricted head-neck posture
- Clearly resistant to the bit
- Clearly above or fighting against the bit
- Occasional extremely deep head position in connection with restricted or tight head-neck posture

RED

Unacceptable OR Not Okay

- Extreme posture positions with fixation caused by athlete or devices
- Continuous physical contact of the horse's chin with the chest caused by the athlete's influence
- Deliberate, extreme over flexing sideways
- Continuous extremely deep head position in connection with restricted or confined head-neck posture



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE THE MOUTH

GREEN

Horse Friendly

- Closed mouth
- Content, supple chewing
- Supple, moving and naturally salivating lips
- Occasional opening of the mouth

YELLOW

Cautionary

- Stressed, grinding of teeth
- Open mouth in distress
- Showing of teeth
- Tongue above the bit

RED

Unacceptable OR Not Okay

- Tongue pinched/turned blue
- Blood, lesions, and rawness in or around the mouth or blood in saliva
- Open, bleeding, bare, or raw patches
- Constantly open mouth in connection with tack



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE USE OF EQUIPMENT

GREEN

Horse Friendly

- Properly fitted equipment such as a noseband with sufficient room for chewing
- Correct use of equipment and bridles

YELLOW

Cautionary

- Overly tight equipment (bit, noseband, boots, bandages, etc.)
- Too tight or loose double bridle
- Incorrect use of bridles or bits

RED

Unacceptable OR Not Okay

- Using equipment in an unreasonable way that restricts the horse's movement (ex. draw reins, noseband)
- Injuries, bloody or raw patches caused by equipment
- Use of harsh, non-approved bridles or bits
- Misuse or excessive use of the whip or spurs. Refer to whip rules



OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE

How to Report

At USEF competitions, report any yellow or red concerns you see immediately to a USEF competition official.

If you have witnessed an act that jeopardizes the safety and welfare of a horse, you should report to USEF by completing a [Horse Abuse & Unethical Treatment Report Form](#) at USEF.org or by contacting USEF directly.

You can also anonymously submit a report by text or WhatsApp to 28733 (2USEF).

Competition Officials Contact with Athletes

Depending on the situation, competition officials contact with the athlete may be:

- **Advisory in nature and provide clarification for both sides.**
- **Cautionary in nature, potentially involving the trainer for a more comprehensive resolution.**
- **Or if action is taken – Verbal Warning, Recorded Warning, Yellow Warning Card, disqualification, or elimination. (USEF may assess additional penalties if the circumstances warrant)**

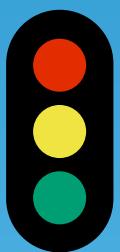


OBSERVATION OF HORSE AND ATHLETE

CONCLUSION

Conflict-free cooperation between human and horse is the goal, however sometimes practices can blur the lines between positive and negative.

It is necessary to be educated on the numerous observable aspects of a horse and know the practices and situations that require reporting.



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USEF HORSE WELFARE

