

Savage Passage: Down the horse slaughter gauntlet

Animals' Angels Horse Slaughter Investigations 2007-2015 Short Paper

A seven year long investigation by Animals' Angels (AA) reveals that dangerous handling and treatment that is unthinkable for a normal horse is standard practice in the horse slaughter circumstance. Accepted are practices that horse owners, humane officers and veterinarians would normally challenge and condemn. When a "kill horse" is severely injured, thin, or handled dangerously, there is little or no concern for its well-being or protection.



The "kill horse" is forced to run a gauntlet of neglect, abuse and cruelty. By the time the horse finally stands in the kill box at the slaughter plant, it is often not the worst thing that has happened to it since the horse slaughter journey began.

Several areas of research reveal a number of horse slaughterers' negative effect. Studies show the availability of horse slaughter results in increased cases of theft, abuse and neglect. Despite claims to the contrary, public records prove that the absence of horse slaughter does not contribute to abandonment. Equine veterinarians, taking issue with their profession's business organizations, confirm that the "slaughtering of horses is a brutal and predatory business that promotes cruelty and neglect." European Union inspectors corroborate, citing the failure of humane practices.



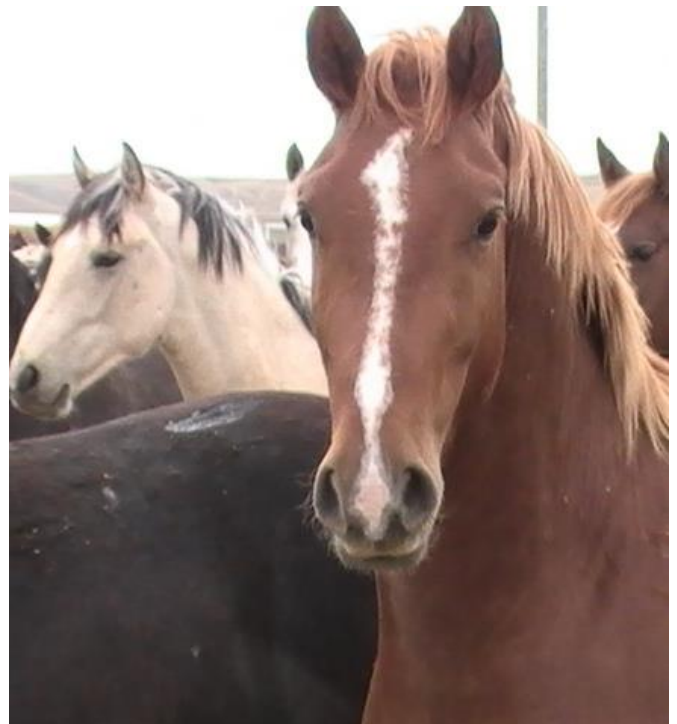
Among the most telling proofs of horse slaughterers' unacceptability are findings and photographs contained in a 906 page document released by the USDA. Released after a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request by Animals' Angels, government records graphically depict horses in extreme distress. Unlike Animals' Angels, USDA investigators had total access to plant operations, taking over 800 photographs during 2005 at a Texas horse slaughter plant. They show horses with their legs ripped from their bodies, with eyeballs hanging down onto their cheeks, and other severe injuries. Even those most closely involved,

found the extreme circumstances allotted these horses were far worse than imagined.



The USDA's findings and Animals' Angels (AA) report are consistent, documenting horses severely injured, untreated, ill, trampled to death and worse as a

result of their slaughter destination. However AA's findings are broader in scope than the USDA documents. The USDA materials relate to 11 months at a Texas horse slaughter plant while **AA investigations over the last seven years include auctions, feedlots and export pens, as well as slaughter plants. Some of the less grisly aspects of horse slaughter, the passive or quiet cruelty endured by "kill horses," are here at these locations.** Illegally transported blind horses and heavily pregnant mares, horses denied necessary veterinary care, neglected and emaciated young horses—all stand



quietly waiting for the next ordeal. AA investigators found that at every juncture of the horse slaughter pipeline, the horse's plight is inhumane.

The quiet suffering of horses with no access to water, food or rest does not make headlines unless perhaps a number of dead horses in a feedlot results and are discovered. Even then, a shrug of indifference and, "Weren't they going to slaughter anyway?" may hinder reportage or legal action.

Despite the closure of the last U.S. horse slaughter plant, AA has found that the same levels of brutality documented by the USDA during 2005 are ongoing. Pro horse slaughter groups have called for the reopening of U.S. horse slaughter plants, claiming horses would be better protected by U.S. humane laws than by laws in Canada and Mexico where American horses are now being transported for slaughter.



Yet USDA records prove operation of horse slaughter plants on U.S. soil did not provide even moderate assurances of humane treatment. Nor is there reason to believe, according to a 2008 GAO report, that humane practices would be practiced today if plants were operational.



With repeated visits to auctions, feedlots and slaughter plants, AA investigators collected reliable, recurring evidence showing that the systemic cruelty of horse slaughter continues through the present. **To be cost effective, horse slaughter subjects horses to a gauntlet of neglects, violence, terrors, and a barrage of life threatening circumstances, even before they arrive at the slaughter plant.** At the

slaughter plants operators are urged speed and quantity, to kill faster and more, to meet increasing quotas, and horses are made to suffer more.

Short Report

The following Short Report offers a compressed overview of the full Animals' Angels investigations. It spells out a disturbing indifference to suffering, and the straightforward brutality of the horse slaughter industry. AA investigators' objective observations and their uninterpreted and factual **notes of field work are the basis for this report and as such conveys a detached and unemotional tone and therefore does not directly address the suffering observed.** A brief evaluation follows the report below.

- A mare down in an auction pen is groaning and barely moving. Further inspection reveals that her gums are white, a strong indication of a serious health crisis. Investigators immediately notify the auction veterinarian. The veterinarian refuses any kind of care, saying it would be too 'disruptive' to auction goers. The mare, a "kill horse", continues to suffer in evident pain. She dies 8 hours later.



- Downed horses are dragged by a wire wrapped around a back leg and cable-winch into slaughter plant. Photo shows living white horse being dragged up and over a 3 foot tall concrete barrier and into plant.



- Horses designated for slaughter are rushed in and out of the auction arena and sold in 15 to 20 seconds. Normal horses at auction on this day are sold in 1 to 2 minutes, their pens are uncrowded and handling is calm. Often 'kill horses' are not taken to the auction ring at all but sold from the

pens in the back. The chances of these horses being purchased by a normal buyer are very limited.

- At both Canadian and Mexican slaughter plants investigators document horses left in the 'kill box' during lunch breaks. The horses are clearly terrified. Shaking violently, the whites of their eyes showing, the horses are kept in the box thickly coated with blood for entire one hour break. Investigators point out situation to a slaughter plant veterinarian who calls it "unacceptable." However, plant management says the horses "aren't bothered by it."
- Horse designated for slaughter has a severe, profusely bleeding knee injury acquired in an overcrowded auction pen. Investigators find auction veterinarian but care is refused. 'That horse is going to slaughter anyway, so there's no need to do anything,' the veterinarian states.



- Horse is kicked in the chest or head packed into a dangerously crowded auction pen (investigator on catwalk above the pen cannot tell whether chest or head). She immediately drops to the ground dead.

- Truck's DOT# reveals long record of multiple violations: Driving without a commercial driver's license, inoperative brakes, leaking brakes, wheel shaft loose or missing, no record of driver duty status, failure to maintain log book, unsafe vehicle violations, fuel tanks violations, and others.

- Slated to be auctioned on the following day, many very thin, slaughter-tagged horses are



shaking violently in the cold, several without winter coats, and covered with ice crystals. After an overnight low temperature of minus 13 degrees Fahrenheit, investigators find horse dead, frozen to the ground. Horse injured overnight in pen area bleeding profusely from badly thorn ear, blood is frozen on face and neck. Remaining horses are not moving at all and very lethargic.

- Investigators find horses at horse slaughter feedlots in extremely poor condition. Deep mud makes it very difficult for thin, weak horses to walk. Appearing to be neglected, many are emaciated and limping. Some are coughing with signs of apparent strangles infections. Some are injured, some severely. Some are dead.



- Several horses are observed eating hay that lies on top of dead composting horse carcasses at feedlot. This contradicts biosecurity recommendations by the USDA and the National



Agricultural Biosecurity Center Consortium who specify the necessity of keeping livestock and scavenging animals away from composting carcasses. They warn that tuberculosis and anthrax will survive the composting process and

that pathogens in the compost can spread diseases in humans, animals, soil and plants. In addition to anthrax, the spread of salmonella, toxic fungi, Fecal coliform, and other pathogens must also be controlled. "In terms of biosecurity," they warn, "composting facilities should not be located directly adjacent to livestock production units, and the vehicles associated with operation should be sanitized with appropriate cleaning and disinfecting agents for each trip." None of these safety measures were observed by investigators.



- Investigators contact governing state agencies and learn that horse slaughter feedlot has for many years operated a concentrated animal feeding operation" (CAFO) without required permits. Feedlot receives Notice of Violation; no fines or penalties are assessed.
- State environmental inspectors find feedlot's composting of carcasses is inadequate.
- State agency investigators cite feedlot for illegal storage of industrial solid waste. No fines or penalties are assessed.



- **Auction workers force horses into dangerously overcrowded pens with 5 to 6 foot ceilings.** Kicking, biting and fighting, several horses are quickly injured. Some seem dazed after loudly banging their heads on the low ceiling as they try to avoid being kicked or bitten. Four tall draft horses are forced to hold their heads low and are kicked badly in the face and head. Mayhem continues for 90 minutes.



- **Investigators inform plant veterinarian that electric prods are being used to move horses.** She appears genuinely surprised and unaware. Visiting the floor she is whistled at and made fun of by workers and appears generally intimidated. She looks stunned seeing an electric prod hanging next to the kill box.



Investigators believe her response and the workers' treatment of her indicate she seldom if ever inspects the kill floor as required by law.

- **Public records show driver has violated the Commercial Transport of Equines to Slaughter regulations several times, transporting horses unfit for travel-- not older than six months, blind in both eyes, likely to give birth during the trip, not able to put weight on all four limbs, not able to walk unassisted.**

- **At slaughter plant pens investigators find newborn foals, and near-term foals dead, horses down and unable to rise, some are dead. Trucks arrive with horses unable to rise, some dead. In some cases almost all horses are limping as they are unloaded. Plant owner tells investigators that dead horses were “too lazy” to get a drink of water. Horse with broken leg is forced into kill box.**



- **European Commission Government Inspectors report conveys alarming condition of horses and conditions at slaughter plant. EU inspectors reference an “abnormal death rate” and**



violations of EU animal welfare regulations. Plant operations fail to meet required standards. **Certificates filed by the plant are false. At this slaughter plant 90% of horses are extremely emaciated. Veterinarians with the Amer. Assoc. of Equine Practitioners and the Unwanted Horse Coalition visit the plant during the same period. They**

declare the plant is “well-run” and the horses “slimmer.” Their ‘slimness’ is attributed to owners keeping their horses for longer than they could afford (*Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association*, January 2009).

- European Union inspectors report insufficient drug testing, and that **U.S. horses arriving at the plant for slaughter are not tested for drug residues at all.**



four legs. Auction workers are kicking the horse with unrestrained force in the head, stomach, back and hindquarters.

- **Handling of horses is extremely brutal,** sticks are unusually thick. Auction workers in seeming rage, hitting with a loud ‘whacking’ sound over the heads of horses, slamming gates on horses’ midsections, hindquarters, heads and necks. Workers jab horses in the eyes and face.
- Horse is unable to bear weight on all
- Investigators find a **horse dead and frozen to the ground** at a horse slaughter collecting facility where the **overnight temperature was 7 degrees Fahrenheit.** Despite the temperature, horses had **no access to shelter though barns were available on the premises.**
- **Heavily pregnant but emaciated mare violently attacks** hay that sympathetic auction visitors toss her. Here, 80% of the horses are extremely emaciated. Worker tells inquiring visitors that these horses are being held for the “humane society” and “fattened up.” Further investigation proves this is completely untrue. The horses are later sold to a known “kill buyer.”





- **Auction workers force 27 horses into pen that would probably hold 8 normally. A smaller horse goes down, cannot get up as it is straddled by another horse and about to be trampled. AA investigator calls out loudly until workers acknowledge and manage**

situation.

- **Federal motor carrier record shows driver in violation of numerous regulations - driver using or in possession of**



drugs, failure to maintain a log book, driving while disqualified, and exceeding maximum hours without rest. Investigators follow

trucks packed with horses and maintaining speeds of 80 mph.

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- Each time a known “kill buyer” bids on a horse, the auction audience can be heard murmuring, ‘Uh oh, that’s the meat man’, or ‘Oh my god, it’s going to the meat man’, or simply ‘That poor horse.’.
- **Horses are without food and water troughs are empty at export pens. Temperatures often exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Investigators document presence of several extremely emaciated horses. Horses unable to bear weight on all four limbs are loaded onto slaughter trucks. Workers fail to separate stallions from mares. USDA Export Pen Veterinarian tells investigators that if a horse is unfit for transport it is left behind to die in the pen.**



Evaluation/Consideration

This report provides documentation of **the numerous ways horse slaughter is inhumane**. At the moment a horse is designated a 'kill horse' fated for slaughter, handling and treatment change radically from that normally given horses. A 'kill horse' is treated with disturbing cruelty, with high levels of violence and aggression, and with apathy and indifference even from those who would normally protect and advocate for the animal's well-being.



Any horse can readily become a kill horse. A killer buyer, anxious to fill his quota and get his price per pound, buys a 4 year old, broke-to-ride horse. A horse whose owner unknowingly drops him off at the sale barn without required Coggins papers, is immediately put in the 'kill pen.' Horses stolen the night before are sold from the 'kill pen' and headed for export within hours of being taken. The family selling their daughter's horse as she heads for college, 'so someone else can enjoy him,' realizes too late that the buyer is someone auction-goers refer to as 'the meat man.' **As this report is prepared for release, 3 horses stolen while tied at an event are lucky, they are found in the 'kill pen' before the auction.**



While cruelty and inhumane treatment immediately mushroom for these horses, concern for their safety, health and care are so diminished they are virtually nonexistent.



At no time did investigators observe, nor were they ever able to secure, veterinary care for horses at feedlots. Thin and emaciated horses, horses with injuries and illness, do not receive the attention they need. They may or may not live long enough to be slaughtered. Typically investigators were told the horses are 'only passing through.' Humane officers were rarely willing to work with investigators to secure vet care, shelter, adequate water and feed. With a normal horse owner, officers would have required proper care and shelter in keeping with state

animal cruelty laws. Instead a blind eye is turned to what would normally lead to charges of animal abuse and neglect.

With no economic incentive to provide proper veterinary care, and no effective legal threat to induce humane care, dead horses are common.



In only 2 instances did investigators observe horses being examined for compromised health before loading. **A weak horse that goes down in the packed trailer will almost certainly be trampled to death.** Young horses and small horses are also at special risk of being trampled.





In this transport environment it is within the law to haul horses for a full 28 hours without water, rest or food. Normal horses are not typically subject to such treatment--responsible owners viewing 28 hour transport without rest, water or food as extremely inhumane.

At the slaughter plants living horses' humane treatment is superseded by economics. Profitability requires speed. But as speed and the rate of slaughter increase, errors and horses' suffering increase. Holding up the kill line is frowned on. **Operators are pressured to kill faster, egged on with, 'Hurry it up, guys!'**, **'What's the hold up?!'**, **'One more!'**, and just plain **'Hurry up, kill her!'**

AA investigators found that horse slaughter also encompasses **public safety issues, public health concerns, and environmental issues**: a driver charged with drug possession or excessive driving times; the threatened spread of anthrax, salmonella, tuberculosis, and soil contamination; unresolved concerns regarding drug residues in horse meat; trucks hurdling down the nation's highways at 80 mph with unstable loads. **But most glaring is the cruelty and inhumane treatment of horses inherent to the business and economics of commercial horse slaughter.**