Fact Sheet: Transport to Slaughter

It is the united opinion of the Veterinarians for Equine Welfare (VEW) that opponents of legislation currently before the United States Congress that would end horse slaughter and prohibit export of horses for slaughter, have been misleading when stating that horses being transported to slaughter are well-protected by existing federal regulations. This clearly is not the case and the links below provide graphic examples of the condition of slaughter-bound horses during transport.

VEW supports S. 1281, the Horse Transportation Safety Act of 2011, introduced on June 27, 2011 and sponsored by Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). The Horse Transporation Safety Act will ban the hauling of horses on double deck trailers for any purpose.

Since 1989, approximately 2 million horses have been slaughtered at USDA-approved horse slaughter plants. [1] The majority of horses are purchased (by commercial killer-buyers who contract with slaughterhouses) at auction terminals across the US and Canada and then transported to one of three existing slaughter plants located in Texas and Illinois. [2] To attempt to ensure that horses destined for slaughter are handled and transported in a humane way, and in response to action taken by various humane organizations, Congress included in the 1996 farm bill authority for the Secretary of Agriculture to issue guidelines to regulate the commercial transportation of horses to slaughter by persons regularly engaged in that activity within the United States. [3]

The regulations issued by the Secretary of Agriculture, which were published in December 2001, are available at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/. Although the intent of Congress was to protect horses being sent to slaughter, the resulting regulations are inadequate, unclear, and contain many loopholes. The net result is that the regulations are very difficult to enforce, there has been little improvement in transport conditions, and horses continue to experience inhumane treatment en route to slaughter.

On September 7, 2011 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued the final rule that amended the regulations under the Commercial Transport of Equines to Slaughter Act to extend the protections now afforded to horses that are transported directly to slaughter facilities to include horses bound for slaughter, but first transported to intermediate collection points, such as assembly points, feedlots, or stockyards. The new rule will go into effect on October 7, 2011.

The final rule makes several changes. The primary change broadens the application of the Act by expanding the definition of "equines for slaughter" to include "any member of the Equidae family being transferred to a slaughter facility, including an assembly point, feedlot, or stockyard." Previously, the rule only applied to horses moved directly to a slaughter plant. In effect, the rule change moves-up the point at which the regulations apply in the process of moving horses to a slaughter facility. The rule changes provide equines delivered to intermediate points en route to slaughter with the same protections regarding food, water, hour limits, and the prohibition on double-decker trucks, as those horses moved directly to plants.
This change eliminates the possibility that horses en route to slaughter could be transported to an assembly point in a double-deck trailer and without any of the protections afforded under the regulations. USDA believed equines were delivered to these intermediate points en route to slaughter in part to avoid compliance with the regulations. The final rule change eliminates that possibility.


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**Note:** Inclusion of external links here is not an endorsement; those listed are not necessarily in accordance with VEW aims and policies.