

One of the best ways to establish a good working relationship with your local law enforcement officials is to make contact with them and offer your expertise and support before you are thrown together under the pressure of a cruelty case. The opportunity to work with law enforcement agencies during a horse rescue situation is important in establishing your organization as a professional, knowledgeable and reliable group that can be counted on for assistance.

When the call comes for assistance, a thorough evaluation of the situation should be made during the initial call from law enforcement including address and detailed directions to the location. Remember that cell phones and internet service cannot be relied on in some rural areas.

Plan ahead for the following:

- Quick response time to calls for assistance
- A well thought out plan for catching, loading and transporting the equines
- Bringing all necessary equipment and personnel required for a smooth operation
- An organized team of people who work well together and know their roles; a designated, competent team leader is essential to a successful rescue.

Be prepared to offer your expert opinion on the condition of the animals and their environment. Remember that not all law enforcement personnel are familiar with normal body condition and proper care of equines. Many agencies offer no training in animal cruelty investigations (especially related to equines), so officers may look to you to help evaluate the animals and offer information that will help them make informed decisions.

Your role is multi-faceted. In addition to be an equine professional, you are an ambassador for your organization, equine welfare advocate, eye-witness, educator and horse owner's resource for assistance. You must be have the ability to perform the necessary documentation and reporting of the horse's condition and situation including their environment and be responsible for the post rescue follow-up.

During the actual rescue operation, everyone on-hand should remain maintain a professional demeanor at all times. There should be no negative dialogue regarding the owner. If any information can be obtained from the owner regarding the equines (names, ages, behaviors, training and any other history that may be important) it should be acquired in a calm and non- judgmental tone.

Information and documentation is vital. Have a qualified person in your group designated to perform the role of information gathering and documentation to include photographic evidence of the animals and the property. Body condition scoring and written descriptions of all physical injuries, marks, etc. are vital prior to removal of the animals. This can be presented as evidence of physical abuse, neglect and body condition at the time of rescue.

Follow-up documentation is just as important in order to show that improvement in the equine's health and physical condition has been accomplished through appropriate care. Written record of all

care including, veterinary care, nutrition, supplements, medications (to include vaccinations), parasite control and farrier care should be documented for each animal. Keep all documentation organized and make backups of all computerized photos and documents.

Maintain routine contact during the course of the investigation and trial with the law enforcement investigator assigned to the case. Provide photographs and documentation in a timely manner and keep them informed of important updates regarding the animals' condition. Be prepared to offer expert and eyewitness testimony during a court hearing.

A good relationship with your local law enforcement team is an important asset. Keep the lines of communication open. Be professional, approachable, positive and helpful. You may be the person they rely on to help them decide whether or not to pursue animal cruelty charges against an equine owner, or the one they ask to provide owner education and/or assistance. You can make the difference in how your organization and animal welfare advocates in general are perceived. Take this role seriously; be mindful in all that you do with and for your law enforcement partners on behalf of the many animals relying on you to be their advocate.

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