

Veterinary Ireland Media Release – Upcoming changes in Equine Legislation



Upcoming changes in Equine Identification Legislation

Some important changes to the laws relating to horse identification are due to be introduced shortly. Currently all horse owners (apart from exceptions in a limited number of cases) are required by law to have a passport for each individual horse, pony or donkey they own. From 1 July 2009 all equine passport applications must be accompanied by a microchip number. The microchip is inserted in the horse's neck by a veterinary practitioner, and the microchip number will also be recorded in the passport.

Under EU law the horse is a food-producing animal and owners are required to keep a record of any medicines administered to the animal, and of the meat withdrawal times of these medications. If certain useful, and sometimes life-saving, medications are necessary to treat a sick or injured horse, the administering veterinarian and the owner must sign and stamp the horse's passport to exclude the animal from the food chain. This is to protect consumers from residues of medicines in the meat.

There are few responsible avenues of disposal of horses when they come to the end of their life. The animal may be humanely destroyed by a veterinary practitioner and the carcass collected and disposed of at a Category 2 meat plant (knackery). It is not permitted under Irish law to bury horse carcasses for environmental reasons so the owner must pay to have the carcass safely disposed of in this manner.

Slaughter for human consumption is a legitimate avenue for disposal of horses when they come to the end of their life and meat factories may pay the owner a moderate sum of money for their animal. Horse slaughter is carried out in a supervised and humane manner at licensed factories, as close to the point of horse production as possible. These factories are inspected and controlled by DAFF or a Local Authority in the ROI and DARD in Northern Ireland. When a horse is slaughtered for human consumption it must be accompanied by a valid passport that permits entry to the food chain.

At this time, it is still possible to obtain a passport for your adult horse that will allow it to enter the food chain. However, from 1 July 2009, all **new** passports issued for horses **over 6 months of age** who have never had a passport will automatically be stamped to prevent the horse from

entering the food chain **for life**. If your horse is an adult and does not have a passport, you have until 1 July 2009 to apply for and obtain a passport, whereby, if you comply with EU regulations regarding medicine residues, your horse may still enter the food chain when it comes to the end of its life.

The Equine Interest Group of Veterinary Ireland is concerned that the exclusion of a large number of adult horses from one legitimate avenue of disposal will create a major welfare problem for horses. Owners may abandon their animals rather than pay to have them humanely destroyed and disposed of safely, or sell them to dealers who may transport horses over long distances, sometimes in poor conditions, for the overseas meat trade.

Key Points for horse owners:

Check that all your horses have a valid passport. If this is the case you do not need to take any further action at this time.

If you have undocumented animals you should contact your veterinary practitioner in order to obtain a passport for each one. If you do this before July 1st 2009 the current rules still apply and your horse will not automatically be excluded from the food chain for life.

Owners of all foals born after July 1st 2009 have a 6 month period to obtain a passport which gives them the option to exclude the animal from the food chain or not.

All passport applications made after 1st July 2009 for animals over 6 months of age at the time of application will be automatically excluded from the food chain for life.

All duplicate or replacement passports issued after July 1st 2009 will automatically exclude the horse from the food chain permanently.

For more information

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