



HORSE WELFARE AND SAFETY PENALTY GUIDELINES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Q – Why is the USEF creating these new rules regarding horse welfare and safety penalties?

A – The rules governing horse welfare and safety have not changed. The newly approved penalty guidelines are not rules; they are guidelines that are not mandatory, but have been prepared to assist the Hearing Panels with the types and ranges of penalties to impose in these cases. GR703 currently includes the full range of penalties contained in the recently approved guidelines. Click [here](#) to view GR703 in the USEF Rule Book.

Q – Why are the penalty guidelines necessary?

A – Currently, USEF rules governing horse welfare and safety cases do not provide a guide as to the level of penalty for categories of violations. Over the course of the past several years, the USEF has received significant feedback from its members and officials stating that previous penalties for horse welfare and safety violations are no longer sufficient, should be increased, should be consistent in like circumstances, and should be published to provide a deterrent against inappropriate behaviors. The USEF has responded to its membership and officials and further strengthened its long-standing commitment to horse welfare and safety.

Q – In what situations will these guidelines be utilized?

A – The guidelines may be utilized in horse welfare and safety cases that end in a hearing before a USEF Hearing Panel when a violation of USEF rules is determined to have occurred. Many issues are currently, and should continue to be, addressed in the field by our licensed officials in accordance with USEF general and breed/discipline rules and never reach the level that requires a hearing. We do not expect this to change due to the approval of these guidelines. It is important to remember that cases affecting the welfare and safety of a horse must be reported for the USEF to act and not all cases end in a hearing. Incidents may be reported by phone or by completing and mailing to USEF the Eyewitness Abuse Report form found [here](#).

Q – How do you verify reports of horse welfare and safety violations?

A – Upon receipt of a report and any evidence alleging a violation of the rules governing horse welfare and safety, an investigation is conducted to determine if the facts in the report are sufficient to open an

inquiry. An inquiry includes communication with the person(s) involved in the allegation to obtain the facts and circumstances of the situation. Following an inquiry, if warranted, a charge may be filed.

The USEF created an Evidence Gathering Guide to assist officials in reporting alleged horse welfare and safety violations. This guide can also be utilized by members and details the type of evidence that may be used during a regulatory proceeding to prove or disprove the allegations. Click [here](#) to view the Evidence Gathering Guidelines.

The USEF takes any report of an alleged violation of the horse welfare and safety rules seriously. ***Furthermore, the USEF considers the deliberate filing of false reports to be prejudicial to the best interests of the sport and action will be taken by the USEF against any individual who deliberately files false reports.***

Q – How will the application of the guidelines be fair and consistent?

A – Hearing Panels consist of horsemen and horsewomen representing the disciplines and breeds under the umbrella of the USEF. No one serving on a Hearing Panel is permitted to have a conflict of interest and the parties to the action can have panel members recused. The guidelines will result in greater consistency in penalties for similar violations and still provide the flexibility to consider the individual facts and circumstances of each case. Additionally, the guidelines require that the Hearing Panel must identify the basis for the penalties imposed.

Q – Do the Hearing Panels have to use the guidelines?

A - These Guidelines are not mandatory or binding on the Hearing Panels and are intended to provide a basis upon which discretion can be exercised consistently in like circumstances.

- Depending on the facts and circumstances of each case, a Hearing Panel may determine that no purpose is served by imposing a penalty within the range provided in these Guidelines.
- In some cases, a penalty below the stated range, or no penalty at all, may be warranted. Conversely, a Hearing Panel may determine that the facts and circumstances of a specific case may call for the imposition of penalties above or otherwise outside of a stated range. Examples include, but are not limited to prior rule violations, egregious misconduct, the need for increased deterrence, or certain policy considerations.
- Federation Hearing Panels must always exercise judgment and discretion, and consider appropriate aggravating and mitigating factors in determining appropriate penalties in every case.
- In addition, whether the penalties are within or outside of the range stated in the Guidelines, Hearing Panels must identify the basis for the penalties imposed.

Q – What is the difference between a rule and a guideline?

A – A rule is an explicit regulation governing conduct within a particular activity. A guideline establishes a general principle, standard, or best practice. Penalty guidelines may be used as deemed appropriate by the Hearing Panels to assist with determining penalties for violations of USEF rules.

Q – What is the definition of excessive?

A – Excessive can be defined as more than is fair, reasonable and appropriate under usual, normal and ordinary circumstances. As is current practice, if a case comes before a Hearing Panel they will determine whether the incident is deemed excessive based on the circumstances and facts in the case.

Q – What if my horse collapses or is injured and dies while lungeing, schooling, or competing?

A – The guidelines would only apply to cases that go before a Hearing Panel and a person is found to have deliberately acted in a manner that led to or caused the death of the horse. In order for a collapse or injury and death to be referred to a Hearing Panel, there would need to be sufficient evidence that the collapse or injury and death resulted from behaviors or actions that violate USEF Rules.

- As an example, if your horse was showing signs of distress and you ignored an official's directive to stop lungeing, riding, or competing, depending on the circumstances and facts presented at a hearing, it may be determined that the guidelines should be considered in determining a penalty.

Q – What if my horse colics and dies?

A – No, the guidelines would not apply unless there was evidence that the colic and subsequent death resulted from deliberate or bad acts by a member.

Q – What if I use draw reins or a bit on my horse when the rules do not permit their use or I momentarily lose my temper?

A – The vast majority of these types of violations do not reach the level of a hearing and are dealt with on site at a competition, in accordance with USEF general and breed/discipline rules, which may include verbal warnings, warning cards, and elimination from current and future classes during the competition, etc. Should a violation of this type result in a hearing, the penalty would be decided by the Hearing Panel as is current practice.

Q- What is an example of an unintentional death?

A – An unintentional death occurs when a person did not perform any acts with the intention of killing the horse and its death occurred without malicious intent formed prior to the acts. An example of unintentional death includes a horse breaking a limb while lungeing, schooling or competing that was not the result of a purposeful act by a person to cause the horse's death.

Q – Why are violations of the 12-Hour rule, when a forbidden substance is involved, included in the guidelines?

A – Forbidden substances are those which are not permitted to be in a horse's system during competition and depending on the substance, could jeopardize the safety and welfare of horse and human.

Q – What is the protocol on welfare and abuse violations when competing in FEI competitions?

A – Officials and competitors must follow the process outlined in FEI General Regulations Section VIII and also discipline specific FEI regulations.

Q – Are the guidelines applicable to incidents that occur off a competition grounds?

A – These guidelines apply to USEF licensed competitions. If you wish to report a known or witnessed incident that occurs outside of a USEF licensed competition, we encourage you to contact local law enforcement or The Humane Society of the United States.

We encourage all participants to use their best judgment and do everything possible to ensure the safety and welfare of their horses is a top priority. The United States Equestrian Federation takes allegations of cruelty, abuse and neglect seriously and has no tolerance for this type of behavior at our Licensed Competitions.

The Bylaws and Rules of the United States Equestrian Federation enable the Hearing Committee to grant reciprocity for equine cruelty, abuse, or neglect when disciplinary action has been taken against a person by an administrative agency; arbitration or other tribunal body; humane society; or court of law, whether civil, criminal, arbitral or administrative.

If you have additional questions, please contact Emily Pratt at epratt@usef.org.