

2025 USDA Horse Protection Act (HPA) Rule Overview

What is the Horse Protection Act of 1970 (HPA)?

The Horse Protection Act is a federal law prohibiting sored horses from participating in shows, exhibitions, sales or auctions and the transportation of sored horses to or from these events. All horses are included, at all covered events. Events where speed is the primary factor, rodeo events, parades and trail rides are excluded.

What Does the HPA Do?

- Defines a sore horse
- Establishes a system for the identification of sore horses at covered events and the penalization of those found in violation of the law.
- Authorizes USDA to enforce the Act and establish regulations that outline how enforcement will be conducted and specify what devices, substances and practices are prohibited.

Who is Covered by the HPA?

- All horses and individuals participating in covered events and the management of those events. Participation does not include spectating.
- USDA has provided guidance on what it considers a covered event. This may evolve over time within the parameters of the HPA.
- USDA regulations under the HPA place specific prohibitions and limitations on all horses at covered events, and even further restrictions on two named breeds – Tennessee Walking and racking horses – breeds that have historically been impacted by soring.

Horse Protection Act: Existing requirements and 2025 updates:

Category	Requirements Prior to 2025	New Requirements as of February 2025
General Responsibility	Event management is responsible for preventing the participation of sore horses.	Event management is responsible for preventing sore horses but must report covered events to USDA and adhere to increased restrictions on Tennessee Walking and racking horses.
Inspectors	Management could (but was not required to) hire an industry inspector (Designated Qualified Person, DQP) to examine horses for compliance and relieve themselves from liability.	Management may (but is not required to) request a USDA Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) or hire a USDA-approved Horse Protection Inspector (HPI) to examine horses for compliance and relieve themselves from liability.
Number of Inspectors	Events with more than 150 horses required at least two inspectors if hired.	Events with more than 100 horses require at least two inspectors if requested or hired.
Action Devices and Pads	All covered events: prohibitions on chains, boots, other devices more than 6 ounces, some artificial toe extensions, some types of pads and shoes. See §11.6 of the rule for details.	Action devices, substances above the hoof and pads (except for therapeutic pads prescribed by a veterinarian) are explicitly prohibited for Tennessee Walking and racking horses. No new requirements for all other breeds.

Category	Requirements Prior to 2025	New Requirements as of February 2025
Reporting Before Events	No specific requirement to notify the USDA before events.	All covered events must notify the USDA at least 30 days before the event. Notification must include event details, whether an HPI or VMO will be used, and if therapeutic pads will be permitted on Tennessee Walking and racking horses.
Reporting After Events	For events with Tennessee Walking and racking horses, management submits report on horses disqualified, including if no disqualification, within 5 days. For all other events, management must notify the USDA within 5 days of any horse excused or disqualified for soring.	For events with Tennessee Walking and racking horses reporting requirements remain, but management must also submit detailed post-event results within 5 days, including detailed reasons for disqualification. For all other events the management must submit information within 5 days to USDA about any case where a horse excused or disqualified for soring.
Notification Changes	Limited regulatory oversight over changes to event details.	Management must notify the USDA of any changes to event details at least 15 days in advance of the event.

New requirements as of 2025:

- Ban on action devices, substances above the hoof, pads on Tennessee Walking and racking horses.
- DQP program replaced with USDA-approved HPs or VMOs for independent inspections.
- Event organizers must notify the USDA before events and report results of events including Tennessee Walking and racking horses, including disqualifications for violations. All other events must report any disqualifications for violations.

Key compliance actions for covered events

Before the Event:

- Notify USDA at least 30 days in advance.
- Decide whether or not to request a VMO or hire an HPI.
- Update USDA on changes at least 15 days prior.

During the Event:

- Ensure no sore horses participate.
- Comply with prohibitions on action devices, substances and pads (other than therapeutic pads prescribed by a veterinarian) on Tennessee Walking and racking horses.

After the Event:

- Submit required reports to USDA within 5 days.

For more information and current guidance visit the USDA HPA website: Horse Protection Act www.aphis.usda.gov/hpa