

April 2013

USDA Horse Protection Program: HIO Certification Process

In 1970, Congress passed the Horse Protection Act (HPA) to eliminate the abusive practice of soring by prohibiting the showing or selling of sored horses. The practice of soring horses is aimed at producing an exaggerated show gait for competition and is primarily used in the training of Tennessee Walking Horses, racking horses and related breeds.

The HPA is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). A 1976 amendment to the HPA led to the establishment of a third-party inspection program, referred to as the Designated Qualified Person (DQP) program, for the purpose of enforcing the HPA. A DQP is a person who is appointed by the management of a horse show or sale and given authority to detect horses that are sored, and to otherwise inspect horses for the purpose of enforcing the HPA. A DQP must meet the requirements set forth in Section 11.7 of the HPA regulations, and must be licensed by a horse industry organization or association (HIO) certified by USDA.

Any new HIO desiring USDA certification to train and license DQPs under the HPA shall submit to the APHIS administrator a formal request in writing for certification of its DQP program and a detailed outline of such program for USDA approval, in accordance with Section 11.7(b) of the HPA regulations. The outline must include the organizational structure of the HIO and the names of the officers or persons charged with the management of the HIO. The outline must also contain the following:

- the criteria to be used in selecting DQP candidates and the minimum qualifications and knowledge regarding horses each candidate must have in order to be admitted to the program
- a sample of a written examination which must be passed by DQP candidates for successful completion of the program along with sample answers and the scoring thereof, and proposed passing and failing standards
- the criteria to be used to determine the qualifications and performance abilities of DQP candidates selected for the training program and the criteria used to indicate successful completion of the training program
- the criteria and schedule for a continuing education program and the criteria and methods of monitoring and appraising the performance for continued licensing of DQPs by such HIO. A continuing education program for DQPs shall consist of not less than four hours of instruction per year.

- procedures for monitoring horses in the unloading, preparation, warm-up and barn areas, or other such areas. Such monitoring may include any horse that is stabled, loaded on a trailer, being prepared for show/exhibition/sale/auction, or exercised, or that is otherwise on the grounds of, or present at, any horse show/exhibition/sale/auction.
- the methods to be used to insure uniform interpretation and enforcement of the HPA and its associated regulations by DQPs, and uniform procedures for inspecting horses for compliance with the HPA and its regulations
- standards of conduct for DQPs promulgated by the HIO in accordance with Section 11.7(d)(7) of the HPA regulations
- a copy of the formal training program – classroom and practical – required to be completed by each DQP candidate before being licensed by such HIO. This training program must, at minimum, include:
 - two hours of classroom instruction on the anatomy and physiology of the limbs of a horse
 - two hours of classroom instruction on the HPA and its associated regulations and their interpretation. Instructors for this course must be furnished or recommended by USDA.
 - four hours of classroom instruction on the history of soring, the physical examination procedures necessary to detect soring, the detection and diagnosis of soring, and related subjects
 - four hours of practical instruction in clinics and seminars utilizing live horses, including methods and procedures required to perform a thorough and uniform examination
 - one hour of classroom instruction regarding the DQP standards of conduct promulgated by the licensing HIO
 - one hour of classroom instruction on record-keeping and reporting requirements and procedures

The HIOs that have formally requested USDA certification of their DQP training, enforcement and maintenance program will receive either a formal notice of certification from USDA or the reasons, in writing, why certification of such program cannot be approved. USDA cannot certify any new HIO unless it is in full compliance with all applicable HPA regulations.

Additional Information

For more information contact:
 USDA - APHIS - Animal Care
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 Riverdale, MD 20737
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