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# USDA Strengthens Regulations to Protect Horses from Soring Abuse

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## Press Release

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WASHINGTON, April 29, 2024 – In an effort to end horse soring at Tennessee Walking Horse shows, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health

Inspection Service (APHIS) is announcing strengthened Horse Protection Act regulations. Soring is a cruel and inhumane practice where some owners and trainers chemically or physically irritate or burn horses to provide an accentuated gait that gives them an unfair advantage in walking horse competitions and fraudulent purchase prices at horse shows.

Walking horses are known for their naturally high gait, but to be more successful in competitions some owners and trainers use cruel methods to exaggerate a horse's gait. These inhumane methods may cause the horse to suffer physical pain, distress, inflammation, or lameness while walking and moving.

"For far too long, some within the Tennessee Walking Horse industry have sored and abused their horses, despite the industry's inspection process and our own enforcement efforts," said Jenny Lester-Moffitt, Under Secretary for USDA Marking and Regulatory Programs. "This abuse must stop. Eliminating this cruel practice will help protect horses competing in these shows and level the playing field for the industry. The independent inspection process should strengthen the competition at these shows and benefit the many owners and trainers who do right by their animals."

The stronger regulations include:

- Eliminating industry self-regulation and the role of industry-backed Designated Qualified Persons as inspectors at horse shows, exhibitions, sales, and auctions. Only APHIS inspectors and independent non-APHIS-employed horse protection inspectors screened, trained, and authorized by APHIS will have inspection authority.
- Prohibiting any device, method, practice, or substance applied to a horse that can cause or is associated with soring.
- Prohibiting on Tennessee Walking or racking horses all action devices and non-therapeutic pads, artificial toe extensions, and wedges, as well as all substances on the extremities above the hoof, including lubricants.
- Removing the scar rule from the regulations and replacing it with a more accurate description of visible dermatological changes indicative of soring.
- Amending recordkeeping and reporting requirements for management at covered events to better enforce the HPA.

In 2017, APHIS withdrew the initial Horse Protection Act final rule from public inspection per a memorandum issued by the Executive Office of the President. Following a lawsuit based on that action, the agency [withdrew the 2017 rule](#) on October 30, 2023, and published [a new proposed rule](#), receiving 8,787 comments. The new rule builds upon information we have learned since the 2017 rule was drafted. Notably, it incorporates lessons and science-based recommendations from the 2021 National Academies of Science review of the inspection program.

The Horse Protection Act is a Federal law that prohibits sore horses from participating in shows, exhibitions, sales or auctions. The Horse Protection Act also prohibits the transportation of sore horses to or from any of these events.

A copy of [this rule](#) (611.48 KB) may be viewed today, and the rule will be published in the Federal Register in the coming weeks. This rule will be effective February 1, 2025.