



HARNESS RACING VICTORIA

RACING IN HOT WEATHER POLICY

Purpose

This policy is to assist in the safety and welfare of horses and participants in hot weather conditions at Victorian Harness Racing meetings.

This policy outlines the relevant and appropriate risk factors to be considered when determining whether a meeting should proceed as planned on days of high thermal load and the procedures to be adopted.

Effective Date

This policy comes into effect on 1 February 2017.

Assessing Risk Factors

Environmental Conditions

A day with high ambient temperature, low humidity and a reasonable breeze would not typically cause adverse effects on a Standardbred.

Standardbreds are most likely to be adversely effected by heat stress on days of high ambient temperature, high relative humidity and low wind speed. This would be described as a day of high thermal load.

Although horses cool themselves extremely efficiently through evaporative cooling, this process loses its effectiveness on days of high thermal load (high ambient temperature, high relative humidity and low wind).

Measurement of Thermal Load

The measurement in degrees Celsius included in weather reports is simply air temperature, measured by a Dry Bulb thermometer. It does not provide a comprehensive measure in assessing the potential risks from heat exposure.

The best available measure is the Wet Bulb Global Temperature (WBGT). The WBGT takes into account ambient temperature, humidity, wind speed and cloud cover.

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) is able to provide information on thermal comfort and heat stress indicators on a regional basis through its website, in the form of web bulb global temperature or WBGT. The Stewards officiating at a meeting are able to access this information from the BOM website as it is updated during the day, and therefore able to monitor for the possibility of adverse conditions for racing in hot weather.

The Chairman of Stewards acting at any race meeting is responsible for obtaining the forecast prior to a meeting and accessing the **WBGT shade** temperature throughout the meeting via the below link:

<http://www.bom.gov.au/products/IDV65079.shtml>

Where possible a WBGT thermometer should be used by the Stewards and/or the Official Veterinarian at the racecourse in determining the thermal load.

Individual Factors - Horses

The below factors can possibly influence an individual horse's failure to handle racing in hot weather:

- Travel to a race meeting in a float with low levels of ventilation.
- Horses that are unable to sweat well (dry coated).
- Excitable temperament.
- Not acclimatised to local conditions. (E.g. recently relocated from interstate/New Zealand)
- Lack of fitness. (Resuming from a spell)
- Withholding of water of raceday. (Not recommended during hot weather)

Individual Factors – Participants

The below factors can increase the risk of heat illness in humans:

- High exercise intensity
- Lack of fitness
- Previous history of heat illness or heat intolerance
- High air temperature
- Low air movement
- Heavy clothing and protective equipment
- Lack of acclimatisation
- Dehydration
- Illness (including virus, flu, gastro)
- Medical conditions (including asthma, diabetes etc)

Scratching Penalty

On a race day where the forecast maximum temperature for the race meeting venue is determined by the Bureau of Meteorology to exceed 38 degrees Celsius, the trainer of a horse engaged at that meeting may scratch the horse free of penalty prior to 8.30am on the day of the meeting. Scratching's effected after 8.30am on race day will attract the normal scratching penalty. Such applications may only be made on the day of the race.

Should a horse be scratched oncourse by the Official Veterinarian due to the hot weather conditions the Stewards will consider any recommendations from the Official Veterinarian in determining an appropriate scratching penalty.

Exertional Heat Illness - Horses

Signs of heat stress include:

- Rapid shallow breathing (panting) with flared nostrils
- Excessive sweating
- Elevated body temperature
- Staggering gait / weakness
- Agitated and distressed appearance
- Impulsive kicking with hind limbs or striking out with front limbs
- Occasionally collapse

Should any of the above signs be identified either pre or post-race this must be immediately reported to the Official Veterinarian and the Stewards.

Heat Illness – Industry Participants

Symptoms of heat illness which may not appear obvious may include:

- Light headedness, dizziness – confusion
- Aggression or irrational behaviour
- nausea
- Fatigue

Later symptoms indicating more profound dehydration include:

- Cessation of sweating
- Collapse
- Ashen grey pale skin
- Altered consciousness
- Obvious loss of skill and coordination/clumsiness or unsteadiness

(These symptoms may indicate heat stroke which requires immediate medical treatment. Heat stroke must be treated as a medical emergency).

Measures to minimise the risk of heat illness during rest period include:

- Reducing clothing and resting
- Assisting evaporating cooling with fans and water spray
- Wetting/sponging of the skin
- Applying ice packs to groin and armpits
- Drinking cool water or sports drinks or taking ice

If in the opinion of a participant the conditions are becoming extreme to the point that it is detrimental to their health and safety they must immediately approach the oncourse medical officials and/or the Stewards conducting the race meeting.

Protective Procedures

The below protective procedures should be implemented when the forecast ambient temperature is 38 degrees Celsius or above, or the WBGT shade is 28 degrees Celsius or above.

Race Clubs

- Where possible horses should be stabled out of the sun and in areas that are breezy.
- Ensure adequate wash bays and hoses are available to enable rapid post-race cooling of horses.
- Ensure adequate horse drinking water is available.
- Ensure sufficient ice, water, scrapers, sponges, towels and extra water hoses available. Race club staff should provide large bins and ensure that these are continually stocked with bags of ice and water to assist in the cooling of horses.
- Ensure the swabbing stall interior is as cool as possible, by hosing the roof, allowing adequate ventilation and/or provide fans / air-conditioning.
- Tie-up stalls equipped with fans if possible to enable horses to cool down throughout the day.
- Race clubs must ensure adequate running water is immediately available to thoroughly and repeatedly wet affected horse's in order to maximise evaporative cooling. An adequate number of hoses should be provided for this purpose in the parade ring and the race day stalls by the Club conducting the meeting. The club must ensure that all relevant hoses are connected and have adequate water pressure.
- Horse involvement in post-race presentations minimised or cancelled. (Seek guidance from officiating Stewards).

HRV Stewards

- Race club officials should be informed to have ice, water, scrapers, sponges, towels and extra water hoses available. Race club staff should provide large bins and ensure

that these are continually stocked with bags of ice and water to assist in the cooling of horses.

- Consideration should be given to employing an additional official veterinarian to patrol the stable area and monitor recovering horses.
- Stewards will minimise the time that horses are required to enter the parade ring and assemble at the pre-race circle.
- Horse involvement in post-race presentations minimised or cancelled.
- The Chairman of Stewards may issue directions to race club officials, licensees and the Official Veterinarian to properly give effect to this policy in order to assist the Official Veterinarian in their duties.

Official Veterinarian

Closely monitor horses for signs of heat stress where possible:

- In the tie-up stall area prior to presentation in the mounting yard
- In the parade ring pre-race
- On arrival at the starting point
- On return to the parade ring post-race
- While in the swabbing area (pre- or post-race)

If the official veterinarian is concerned about a horse's condition pre-race, they shall immediately report their concerns to the Stewards.

Any horse found to be exhibiting signs of heat stress will be given appropriate treatment.

Appropriate treatment may include:

- Repeated application of cool water to the entire body of the horse, followed by scraping of excess water from the horse.
- Walking the horse in a breezy, shaded area between bouts of hosing.
- Oral and/or intravenous fluid therapy if indicated.
- Corticosteroid anti-inflammatory treatment if indicated.
- Sedative drugs if indicated.
- Use of air-conditioned stall if available.
- Use of forced ventilation (fans) if available.
- Use of ice-water soaked towels applied to the horse's body and changed frequently as towels heat up.

The official veterinarian should have an adequate supply of relevant treatments on hand for emergency use.

Trainers/Stablehands

Evaporative cooling, particularly sweating, is the most important means of dissipation of body heat for the exercising horse. The liberal application of cold water in shaded, well ventilated places will greatly assist the processes which enable horses to lose excessive body heat on hot days.

Horses can be assisted in cooling down after racing in hot weather by maximising the efficiency of evaporative cooling:

- **“Wet and Walk”** as water evaporates from the skin it removes body heat causing the horse to cool. Increasing air flow over the horse’s skin surface, by walking in shady, breezy areas, improves evaporation rates.
- Horses may need to be hosed and scraped several times in between walking. Scraping of excess water from the coat stops the water acting as an insulating barrier and aids evaporation.
- Bucketing or sponging ice cold water over the horse assists in the recovery of heat affected horses.
- In very humid and wind-still conditions, it may be difficult with the above methods for sweat and water to evaporate quickly enough for adequate body cooling. In these circumstances the use of air-conditioned stalls (which provide cool and **dry** air) and/or the use of fans (to improve air flow over the horse’s skin surface) should be utilised.
- Horses should be allowed to drink as much fresh, clean water of ambient temperature as they require after racing.
- Horses must be allowed sufficient time to adequately cool down before being floated back to their stables in a well ventilated float.

Industry Participants

Heat illness can occur in humans during activity on days of extreme heat conditions.

Participants and race day staff should ensure they maintain a regular fluid intake prior to and during the race meeting to replace fluid losses from excessive sweating. It is preferable to drink cool water and sports drinks with electrolyte additives rather than soft drinks as these often contain sugar or caffeine which further add to dehydration through their natural diuretic effects.

Any participant experiencing signs of heat illness should immediately report such to the oncourse medical officials and the Stewards conducting the meeting.

Race Meeting Postponement/Race Start Time Alteration

All the above factors should be considered by the Chairman of the race meeting and the

officiating Veterinarian in determining whether the meeting is postponed or the race start times altered to a cooler part of the day or night.