

Saying goodbye - euthanasia of your horse

WHAT IS EUTHANASIA?

The aim of euthanasia is to provide a quick and painless death for your horse to avoid unnecessary suffering from illness or injury. Making the decision is never easy. The following leaflet gives you the basic facts enabling you to talk to your vet about your specific situation and determine the right time for you and your horse.



WHY IS EUTHANASIA REQUIRED?

Euthanasia of horses can be performed for the following reasons:

- ▲ Illness resulting in incurable suffering.
- ▲ The horse has become elderly and can no longer be ridden or maintain a good standard of life.
- ▲ The horse has become a danger to the owner, itself or other animals.

WHEN DOES EUTHANASIA OCCUR?

There are two instances when euthanasia can occur:

- ▲ An emergency where an immediate problem has occurred such as severe colic or inoperable fracture.
- ▲ A planned and difficult decision reached with your vet, for an old friend, who may be elderly or incurably lame.

WHERE DOES EUTHANASIA TAKE PLACE?

The familiar surroundings of your horse's home will cause the least disturbance. Planning an area with vehicle access, so your horse can be taken away, is essential. Some owners prefer to bring their horse to the veterinary practice which may be arranged with your vet.

Do I need to be there?

You will want your horse's last minutes to be peaceful. If you feel you can stay calm this will help to relax your horse. You may wish to have a friend or family member present. If you are likely to be distressed, you may wish for somebody to be there instead of you.

Do I need to inform my insurance company?

If your horse is insured, unless there is an unavoidable emergency out of office hours, you should discuss the claim in advance. Your insurers are likely to require a veterinary certificate confirming the identity of your horse and the reason it was euthanised. They will also usually request a post mortem examination.





There are two methods of euthanasia available; both are quick and painless for the horse.

Method 1 Lethal injection

Your horse may be sedated prior to a large overdose of anaesthetic being given by intravenous injection. Your horse will lose consciousness and collapse. Depending upon which product is used, the heart may take some minutes to stop and a few deep breaths may be taken at this stage. With lethal injection you will only be able to cremate your horse.

Method 2 Shooting

Your horse may be sedated prior to being shot. The muzzle is placed on the horse's forehead and it will fall down instantly. You need to be prepared for the noise of the shot, some blood from the nose and some reflex limb movements. Shooting can suit needle-shy horses and death is instant.

What arrangements do I need to make for disposal?

This will depend on the method of euthanasia and the health of the horse when it died. Your vet will be able to advise the best option.

Cremation

Cremation is often used but is expensive. If your horse has been given medication such as a lethal injection or pain killers, cremation may be the most appropriate option. You may wish to have the ashes buried or put in a casket.

Fallen stock collector

The fallen stock collector will charge for the collection of your horse. The cost may be more if your horse has had medication or drugs.

Hunt kennels/zoo

Hunt kennels will also collect your horse but it must be fit for consumption by the hounds. Some zoos also collect animals. If your horse has suffered from a disease or was put down by lethal injection then this will not be an option.

Burial

If you have your own land, it may be possible to bury your horse. You will need to check the current regulations with the Environment Agency and DEFRA first.

