

Minnesota Horse Welfare Guide

Laws and Standards of Care



The Minnesota Horse Welfare Guide, produced by Animal Humane Society and the Minnesota Horse Welfare Coalition, is intended to be a **quick reference guide** of Minnesota State Equine Laws, as well as basic horse welfare information. **The guide is not a comprehensive reference for equine care, nor is it intended to be a veterinary resource.**

The guide offers information regarding the proper care and keeping of horses, helping citizens and law enforcement identify conditions and circumstances where a horse may be vulnerable and need assistance.

Professional resources and assistance with horse welfare concerns are available from Animal Humane Society and the Minnesota Horse Welfare Coalition. Contact information is available at the end of this guide.

A complete listing of all animal welfare statutes regarding the prevention of cruelty to animals can be found at the Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes at **revisor.mn.gov**.

MINNESOTA STATE EQUINE LAWS

Statute 346.38 EQUINES.

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MINNESOTA STATE EQUINE LAWS

Statute 346.38 EQUINES.

SUBDIVISION 1. **DEFINITION.**

"Equines" are horses, ponies, mules, and burros.



Horse



Horse



Pony



Pony



Mule (donkey and horse offspring)



Burro (donkey)

SUBDIVISION 2. **FOOD.**

Equines must be provided with food of sufficient quantity and quality to allow for normal growth or the maintenance of body weight. Feed standards shall be those recommended by the National Research Council.

BEST PRACTICE — FOOD

- Quality hay and pasture (land covered with grass and other low plants) is a complete food source for most horses, however, appropriate feeding must be tailored to the needs of the individual horse.
- Commercially prepared horse feeds, including pellets and/or plain oats, are readily available to supplement hay and pasture for proper horse nutrition.
- Pasture should generally be four inches or taller.



Quality feed — a mixture of oats/corn/pellets — is available from most feed stores.



Quantity of hay is sufficient.



During the summer, pasture is an ideal source of nutrition for most horses.



Grazing pasture grass should be four inches or taller. It is ideal to have both hay and pasture grass available for horses.



Square bales of hay.



Round bales of hay.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — FOOD

- Horses need constant access to healthy pasture for 12–18 hours each day OR adequate quantities of high-quality hay. Pasture and/or hay should be available in the summer; hay must be available in the winter. Overgrazed pastures are not an adequate source of nutrition and must be supplemented with hay.
- An average 1,000-pound horse needs 20 to 25 pounds of hay per day.
- Estimate hay supply by counting the bales to see how many days of hay are available per horse. Typically, a small square bale of hay weighs approximately 40–50 pounds. A large round or square bale weighs approximately 800–1,000 pounds. Approximately four 45-pound square bales of hay, properly stored for freshness, will feed one horse for 1 week. Approximately one round bale of hay, properly stored for freshness, will feed a horse for up to 6 weeks.
- Insufficient hay on hand or lack of hay in storage can be indicators of inadequate/improper feeding.
- Silage (fermented hay and corn stalks) is not suitable feed for horses. While silage is fed to some farm animals, silage is not nutritionally balanced feed for horses and can cause severe digestive issues.



No grass or hay available.



Multiple horses in a large pasture without access to grass or hay.



Insufficient grass, lack of hay for the horse.



The horses are unable to reach the grass.



Hay must be available during winter months.



An overgrazed pasture is not a sufficient source of food.



A dirt paddock. The adjacent pasture has grass, but is unavailable to the horses.



An emaciated horse without access to hay or grass.



Mold on hay is toxic to horses.



Improperly stored, poor quality hay.



A mix of weeds and brush — commonly called willow brush — does not meet the nutritional needs of horses.



Silage (fermented hay) is not a suitable food source for horses and should be fed with extreme caution.

SUBDIVISION 3. **WATER.**

Equines must be provided with clean, potable water in sufficient quantity to satisfy the animal's needs or supplied by free choice. Snow or ice is not an adequate water source.

BEST PRACTICE — WATER

- Fresh, clean water should be available to horses at all times.
- Horses will consume up to 12 gallons of water per day per horse.
- Lactating mares may need up to 18 gallons of water per day.
- Horses generally consume a lot of water at once — and drink a few times per day.
- Horses cannot eat snow to meet hydration needs.



Two tanks provide ample amounts of fresh, clean water.



Water tanks can be various shapes and sizes, as long as the water is fresh.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — WATER

- Horses need fresh water at moderate temperatures — water that is not too hot or too cold.
- Submersible tank heaters are available to keep water suitable for drinking in the winter.
- Cold temperatures may create a skim of ice on water sources, preventing horses from accessing the water.
- Snow is never an acceptable substitute for water.



No fresh water is available for the horses.



Debris in the water tank is hazardous.



Dirty water due to contamination of food/mud is not suitable for horses.



Hay in the water is preventing proper intake for the horses. Water levels are also insufficient.



Water is not fresh and appears green with algae. This is an inappropriate water source.



A skim of ice on the water may prevent the horse from drinking.



A frozen tank of water is not suitable for horses.



Water is frozen solid in the small tank.

SUBDIVISION 4. **SHELTER.**

Equines must be provided a minimum of free choice protection or constructed shelter from adverse weather conditions, including direct rays of the sun, in extreme heat or cold, wind, or precipitation. Natural or constructed shelters must be of sufficient size to provide the necessary protection. Constructed shelters must be structurally sound, free of injurious matter, maintained in good repair, and ventilated. Outside exercise paddocks for equines do not require separate constructed shelter where a shelter is accessible to the equine on adjacent or other accessible areas of the property provided that equines are not kept in outdoor exercise paddocks during adverse weather conditions.

BEST PRACTICE — SHELTER

- Horses can adapt to a variety of weather conditions if allowed time to acclimate to the climate, exhibit proper body conditions, and are provided access to adequate food and water.
- Free choice access to shelter from sun, wind, and rain is appropriate shelter.
- Properly vented barns with stalls to shelter from sun, wind, and rain are appropriate shelter.
- The natural shelter of trees or horses wearing blankets may be sufficient shelter, however, if weather is severe, neither of these may be sufficient shelter.



Shelter is appropriately sized for the horse.



Free access to a clean and safe lean-to shelter.



Free access to a clean and safe lean-to shelter.



Shelter is appropriately sized for two horses.



Free access to the barn for shelter.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — SHELTER



The horse is unable to access shelter.



Open access with limited protection from wind may be problematic.



The shelter's construction is unstable and unsafe.



The shelter is not only unsafe, but fallen debris makes it inaccessible to the horses.



The structure is unstable and only provides shelter from sun, not wind or rain.



Inappropriately-sized shelter.



Lack of shelter.



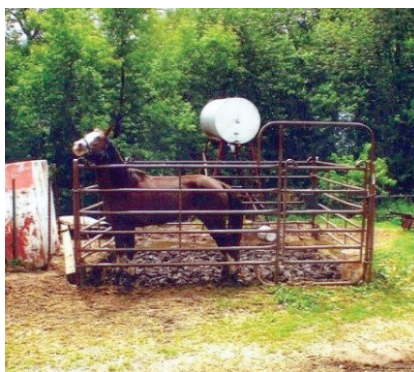
No shelter, barn, or lean-to available when housed permanently outdoors.



The horse is unable to access the shelter due to water, mud, and a partially closed gate.



Horses turned out in a field without shelter available. Note: corn stalks alone are not a suitable food source.



Horse lacks access to shelter when housed in outdoor stall for extended periods of time.

SUBDIVISION 5.

SPACE AND CLEANLINESS REQUIREMENTS.

Constructed shelters except for tie stalls must provide space for the animal to: (1) roll with a minimum of danger of being cast; or (2) easily stand, lie down, and turn around. Stalls must be cleaned and kept dry to the extent the animal is not required to lie or stand in fluids. Bedding must be provided in all stalls, kept reasonably clean, and periodically changed. The nature of the bedding must not pose a health hazard to the animal.

BEST PRACTICE — SPACE AND CLEANLINESS

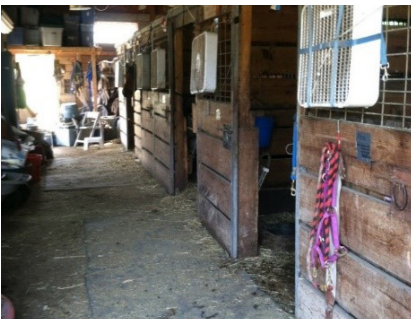
- Horse stalls require adequate space, lighting, and ventilation (windows/fan).
- Daily removal of manure and urine from the stall is necessary.
- Bedding must be dry.
- Fresh, unfrozen water must be available.
- Daily access to a pasture for exercise should be allowed.



Hay and bedding are provided in the stall.



Clean, appropriately-sized stalls with access to water.



Stalls are appropriately sized and equipped with fans to provide air movement.



A proper stall featuring clean bedding, food, and water.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — SPACE AND CLEANLINESS

- A horse must not stand in excessive amounts of manure and urine.
- Ventilation and light must be available.
- A horse must not be exclusively confined to a stall.



Stalls that require cleaning.



Stall is both unsafe and an inappropriate size for the horse.



Debris in stalls; the shelter is unsafe for horses.



Dirty stall lacking food, water, bedding, and proper ventilation. Horses are excessively dirty and in poor condition.



SUBDIVISION 6. **EXERCISE.**

Equines must be provided opportunity for periodic exercise, either through free choice or through a forced work program, unless exercise is restricted by a licensed veterinarian.

BEST PRACTICE — EXERCISE

- Horses should not be confined to a stall without intermittent turnout or exercise.
- Horses should have access to a paddock (small field enclosure) and/or pasture for exercise.



Pen allows exercise for the horse.



Horses have access to roam outside in pastures or paddocks.



Lunge lines are appropriate equipment to exercise a horse within pastures, paddocks, and pens.



NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — EXERCISE

- Horses must have access to pasture, paddocks, or pens.
- Unsafe conditions (too wet/icy/muddy) should be addressed.



Multiple horses are without access to outdoor pens or pastures.



Horse is without access to food, pasture, water, shelter, and/or pens for exercise.



Confined in stall without access to turnout pens for exercise.



Pasture is littered with debris and thick mud. This does not allow for proper exercise.



Limited access to exercise when kept in stalls permanently or for extended periods of time.

SUBDIVISION 7. **HOOF CARE.**

All equines must have their hooves properly trimmed periodically to prevent lameness.

BEST PRACTICE — HOOF CARE

- Smooth, uniform hoof shape — free from cracks, rings, and splits — are signs of a healthy hoof.
- Small cracks can be normal.
- Hoof trims should occur every 6–12 weeks.



Properly shaped and trimmed hoof.



Small cracks are still acceptable.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — HOOF CARE

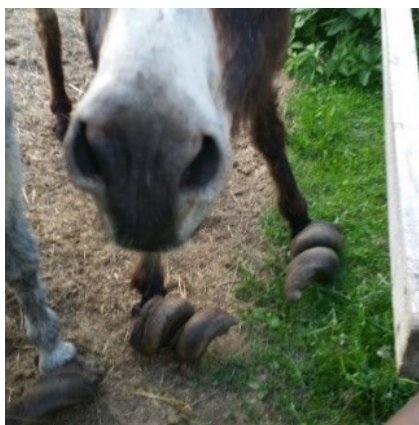
- Cracked and long hooves can be a sign of neglect.
- Severely cracked hooves or hooves that curl up at the toe indicate extreme neglect and require immediate farrier care and/or veterinary care.



An excessively cracked hoof, with splitting and chipping, indicates infrequent hoof care.



Hooves that are too long are in need of trimming/farrier care.



Hooves representing extreme neglect and in need of immediate veterinary and farrier care.



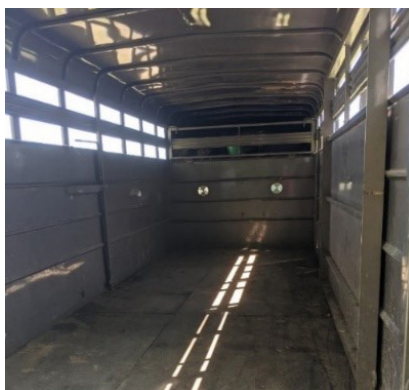
Hoof abscess and hoof rupture requiring immediate veterinary care.

SUBDIVISION 8. **TRANSPORTATION.**

A vehicle used to transport an equine must have a floor capable of supporting the animal's weight safely. Floors must be of nonskid construction or of nonskid material sufficient to provide the animal with traction while in transport. A minimum of 12 inches must be allowed between the withers of the largest equine and the structure above the animal while it is in a natural standing position. Sturdy partitions must be provided at a minimum of approximately every ten feet inside the vehicle. Interior compartments of transporting vehicles must be of smooth construction with no protruding or sharp objects and must provide ventilation. Food and water must be provided in sufficient quantities to minimize stress and maintain hydration.

BEST PRACTICE — TRANSPORTATION

- A horse trailer must be roadworthy with an intact and level floor, free of injurious materials. It must have the capacity to provide food, water, and ventilation.



Examples of safe, clean, roadworthy trailers.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — TRANSPORTATION

- If a trailer is questionable in size or functionality, further inspection is necessary. Note any bending floorboards or holes and look for moisture damage.
- Safe, nonskid floors, free of holes or debris are required.
- Functioning doors that latch and roadworthy tires are required.



Trailer needs further inspection to certify its safety and roadworthiness.



Trailers are non-functional, not roadworthy, and unsafe to transport horses.



BEST PRACTICES FOR HORSE CARE

Unaddressed by MN State Equine Law

FENCING

BEST PRACTICE — FENCING

- A safe horse fence is strong, highly visible, durable, and free of hazards.
- A horse fence can be well-maintained wire, electric, plank, or pipe with sturdy posts.
- A fence should not cause injury should the horse run into it.



Highly visible, sturdy fencing.



Highly visible, sturdy fencing.



Metal fencing panels allow for an adjustable pen size.



Fencing is sized appropriately for the horses and free of hazards.



Fencing is appropriate for the size of horse and free of hazards.



Electric fencing has been taped to provide increased visibility for the horse.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — FENCING

- Loose wire can injure a horse. Well-maintained wire fencing should be taut and have a functioning electric charge.
- While barbed wire is legal and commonly used when fencing large pastures, it can be dangerous horse fencing.
- Gates must close and latch.
- Missing planks and/or downed wires will not keep a horse from escaping.



Barbed wire fencing can cause cuts, lesions, and entanglement may lead to severe injury.



Gates must be functional, fully close, and fasten tight.



Missing planks require immediate repair.



Inadequate fencing may cause serious injury.



Twine string is not an effective fencing material.



Improper fencing can result in horses getting out of pastures, causing deadly auto accidents.

EYES

BEST PRACTICE — EYES

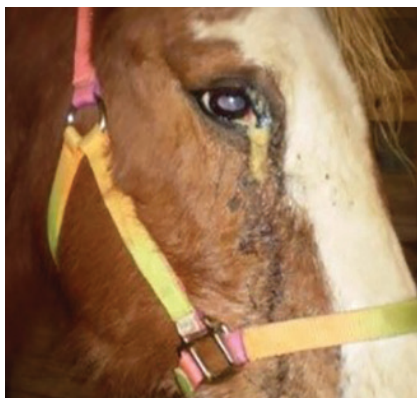
- Eyes should be clear, fully open, and clean.



A horse with clear, clean, healthy eyes.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — EYES

- Eyes should be free of growths, sores, or signs of trauma.
- Eyes should not have unusual discharge or a dull, glazed appearance.
- A cloudy, swollen, or teary eye can be painful and lead to blindness.
- Blind horses may have a green or gray eye, but display no other signs of discomfort.
- Squinting is one way horses demonstrate general pain.



Eye appears cloudy with discharge.

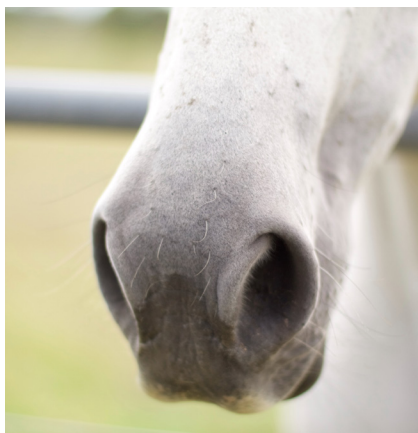


Eye is infected and swollen.

NOSE

BEST PRACTICE — NOSE

- Nostrils should be clean and free of discharge. It is normal to have a trickle of clear liquid from the nostrils.



Clean, healthy nose.



Clean, healthy nose.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — NOSE

- Thick nasal discharge can be a sign of a contagious condition known as strangles, a sign of a respiratory infection, or a dental infection. All conditions require immediate veterinary care.



Horse with infection requiring immediate veterinary care.

LEGS AND FEET

BEST PRACTICE — LEGS AND FEET

- Horses generally stand squarely with weight distributed evenly among all four legs.
- Slightly raising and taking weight off a hind leg is normal, but is cause for concern on a front leg.



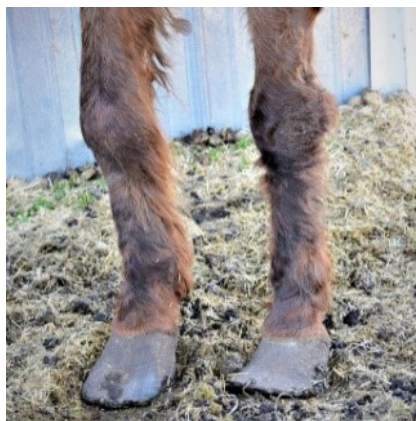
Appropriate, healthy stance.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — LEGS AND FEET

- Legs should be free of bumps, swelling, cuts, and/or hair loss.
- If bumps and/or swollen areas are hot to the touch, veterinary care is required.
- Large knees can be a sign of arthritis and may require veterinary care.



Legs showing open sores and cuts.



Large knees may indicate arthritis.

HAIR COAT

BEST PRACTICE — HAIR COAT

- A shiny, glowing coat is a sign of good health and comes from meeting the horse's nutritional requirements.



Horse with a shiny, healthy coat.



Horses with shiny, healthy coats.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — HAIR COAT

- A dull, patchy coat and/or body sores can be a sign of poor nutrition, parasites, or poor general health.
- A horse may shed its coat in the spring. If a coat does not shed out in the summer, it can be a sign of a metabolic disorder and may require veterinary care.
- Lice and rain rot, a highly contagious inflammatory infection, are two skin issues prevalent in equines. If the horse is rubbing, missing patches of hair, or there are visible eggs that look like rice, inspect closely for lice or rain rot.



Dull, patchy coat.



Dull, patchy coat.



A horse that has not shed their coat may have a disorder.



Horse with rain rot, a contagious skin infection.

COMPANIONSHIP AND ATTITUDE

BEST PRACTICE — COMPANIONSHIP AND ATTITUDE

- Horses naturally live in herds and should not be alone.
- Horses do best when there is at least one other horse with them.
- Humans are not sufficient companions for horses.
- If it is not practical to have a companion horse, goats, cows, sheep, and llamas can be suitable companions.
- Healthy horses are bright, alert, and interested in other horses.
- Horses engage in social activities, such as mutual grooming, playing, and taking turns watching over each other while they sleep.
- Horses will occasionally roll, but should always shake after rolling.

NEEDS INTERVENTION/REQUIRES ACTION — COMPANIONSHIP AND ATTITUDE

- A horse that rolls repeatedly — and often looks at the side of their body — may be experiencing signs of colic (gastic distress), which requires attention.



Two or more horses are preferred for companionship.



Horses show interest in their surroundings.



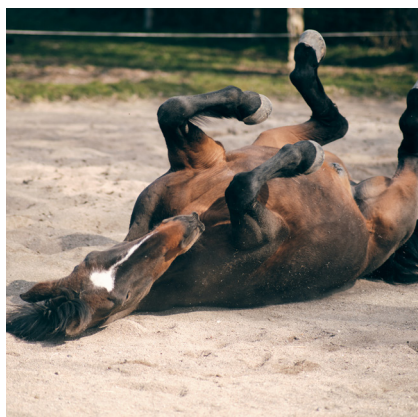
Horses and goats can be companions.



Llamas and miniature ponies can be companions.



Horses mutually groom one another.



Rolling horses should shake when they rise.

BODY CONDITION SCORING (BCS) BASICS

- A body condition score reflects the degree of fat cover on a horse and is a good indicator of their general health. It uses a numerical rating system ranging from 1 to 9.
- A BCS of 1 is extremely emaciated; a BCS of 9 is extremely overweight. An ideal body score should be between 4 and 6.
- Horses with a BCS of 3 or less are considered to be too thin; horses with a BCS of 7 or more are considered overweight and may develop metabolic conditions.
- These photos are general examples of body condition scores; please consult a veterinarian for proper assessment.



BCS 1



BCS 5



BCS 1



BCS 5



BCS 1



BCS 5



BCS 3



BCS 5

SYMPTOMS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION

These situations indicate potentially serious health problems for horses. Owners should contact a veterinarian for diagnosis if these symptoms are observed:

Unable to stand. A horse who is unable or unwilling to stand may be injured or sick.

Unwilling to eat or drink. Horses eat almost continuously. Failure to take interest in food may indicate a serious condition. The average horse in a mild climate drinks 10–12 gallons of water per day.

Unable to bear weight on one leg. Complete unwillingness to use one or more legs for support may indicate injury.

Exhibiting acute lethargy. There may be a physical problem if a horse suddenly becomes uninterested in his surroundings and does not respond to voice or hand contact.

Sweating without exercise. On a hot day, horses sweat moderately on their chest and shoulders. If the horse has not been active and is excessively sweating, it may be in pain.

Exhibiting flared nostrils and rapid breathing without exercise. If a horse is flaring their nostrils and breathing heavily or loudly without previously exercising, this may be a sign the horse is in pain.

Has a laceration or an open wound. Any laceration or wound should receive veterinary attention.

Rolling repeatedly. Horses naturally roll and will lie down for short periods. A horse that gets up and down and rolls repeatedly should raise concerns for abdominal pain and colic.

Eye concerns. A horse producing discharge from their eyes or squinting excessively may indicate eye pain and/or pain somewhere else in the body.



Rolling repeatedly.



Sweating without exercise.



Any laceration or wound should receive veterinary attention.



PROPER HORSE CARE PRACTICES

DAILY HORSE CARE ROUTINE

A typical daily horse care routine, performed twice daily (preferably morning and night), may look like this:

- Feed horses hay and/or grain.
- Clean and refill water buckets.
- Muck out (remove manure and urine) the stalls.
- Replace saturated, dirty bedding with fresh bedding.
- Spray horse with insect repellent during summer months.
- Turn horse out daily for exercise and access to pasture.
- Exercise the horse several times a week.

HORSE FEEDING AND CARE

- Feed good quality hay and grain to provide a balanced diet.
- Feed appropriately for the horse's size, weight, and workload.
- When pasture is available, ensure pastures are not overgrazed.
- Have clean, fresh water available at all times.
- Keep shelters and stalls suitable, safe, and clean.
- Have regular veterinary checks, at least once a year, and farrier care every 6–12 weeks.
- Give regular vaccinations and deworming, as parasites can cause illness or death.





MINNESOTA HORSE WELFARE COALITION

The Minnesota Horse Welfare Coalition (MHWC) is a grassroots organization created to keep horses safe at home and provide necessary help to horses in need. MHWC provides support to people and their horses in the form of microgrants for temporary feed assistance, veterinary assistance, euthanasia, temporary foster, and castration. MHWC is a group of organizations, attorneys, horse rescues, humane agents, and individuals working on behalf of horses to prevent equine neglect, abandonment, and abuse.

CONTACT MHWC

minnesotahorsewelfare.org

info@minnesotahorsewelfare.org

Phone

612-326-4705

Toll free

866-461-4912





ANIMAL HUMANE SOCIETY HUMANE INVESTIGATIONS

AHS is the only animal welfare organization in the state that employs full-time professional humane agents to assist local law enforcement and citizens in Minnesota in response to criminal animal cruelty complaints.

Our agents provide assistance and resources in all 87 counties. Roughly 2,000 reports of neglected or abused animals are received each year, resulting in nearly 7,000 animals being helped by our humane investigations efforts.



Most of the cases reported to agents involve a lack of food, water, shelter, or improper animal care. Larger, more complex cases can result in AHS assisting law enforcement with on-site investigations, animal seizures, and prosecuting offenders.

Issues our humane agents investigate include:

- Domestic animals, horses, and livestock lacking necessary food, water, or shelter as required by law.
- Animal fighting and hoarding.
- Physical abuse or chronic neglect of animals.
- Denial of necessary medical attention to animals who are sick or injured.
- Illegal shooting, trapping, abandonment, poisoning, or torture of any domestic animal.
- Potential injury to animals from tangled leashes, ropes, or chains.
- Animals subject to environmental conditions that may adversely affect the animal's health or welfare.
- Pet stores, petting zoos, boarding kennels, dog kennels, horse stables, and other facilities that are not meeting the minimum standards of care as required by law.





AHS SERVICES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

AHS humane agents collaborate with law enforcement and assistance is provided at no cost. When called upon, our humane agents, veterinary, and animal care staff can provide law enforcement with the following resources and services:

- Technical consultation by AHS humane agents during investigations involving animal cruelty.
- Equipment and trained staff to assist with animal seizure.
- Capture and transportation for large numbers of animals taken into custody.
- Housing for domestic and companion animals at one of our three locations — Golden Valley, Coon Rapids, or Woodbury.
- Medical examinations of involved animals.
- Assistance with exotic animals, large animals, and livestock. AHS has access to a large network of farmers, ranchers, and agricultural resources throughout the state.
- Veterinary staff qualified to perform forensic examinations necessary for criminal proceedings.

CONTACT AHS HUMANE INVESTIGATIONS



Submit a report online

animalhumanesociety.org/humane-investigations

Hotline

612-772-9999 to leave a message for our humane agents

If you do not live in Minnesota, please contact your local humane society or local law enforcement for assistance.



845 Meadow Ln N
Golden Valley, MN 55422