
RESOLUTION NUMBER: 16 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON EQUINE

SUBJECT MATTER: EQUINE EUTHANASIA AND DISPOSAL

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA)'s National Animal Health Monitoring System 2015 Equine Study, the overall mortality rate for horses is 1.4%. The 2017 American Horse Council Economic Survey indicated a total of 7.2 million domestic horses in the United States. Based on these factors, there could be up to 101,000 horses euthanized by private practitioners annually which require disposal. Disposal options include burial, landfill, composting, incineration/cremation, and rendering. Environmental laws and local ordinances may eliminate all options except rendering or incineration. Recent changes in the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) policies restrict the use of animals euthanized with a chemical substance in animal foods. Furthermore, there is currently no set tolerance for pentobarbital, the most common equine euthanasia compound, in pet food. Any rendered product with detectable pentobarbital is considered adulterated by FDA and condemned. Thus, it is the responsibility of the renderer to take appropriate steps to ensure that the product does not contain pentobarbital. Based on the zero tolerance for pentobarbital, renderers across the country are challenged in accepting horse carcasses without knowledge of method of euthanasia.

Equine practitioners rely on the use of pentobarbital for a reliable, consistent, client friendly method of euthanasia. The elimination of rendering options for these carcasses is challenging the practitioner and owner. Additionally, practitioners must consider use of less client-friendly euthanasia agents or other chemical modalities that have limited research validation which have the potential to be prohibited by FDA in the future.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association urges the Food and Drug Administration to develop formal, safe tolerance levels for residues of euthanasia and anesthetic agents in final product of rendering.