

AVMA and AAEP Position on the Use of Action Devices and Performance Packages for Tennessee Walking Horses

The American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Equine Practitioners support a ban on the use of action devices and performance packages in the training and showing of Tennessee Walking Horses.

Action devices used in the training and showing of Tennessee Walking Horses include chains, ankle rings, collars, rollers, and bracelets of wood or aluminum beads. When used in conjunction with chemical irritants on the pastern of the horse's foot, the motion of the action device creates a painful response, resulting in a more exaggerated gait. Foreign substances are being detected on the pastern area during pre-show inspections at an alarmingly high rate, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics. While there is little scientific evidence to indicate that the use of action devices below a certain weight are detrimental to the health and welfare of the horse, banning action devices from use in the training and showing of Tennessee Walking Horses reduces the motivation to apply a chemical irritant to the pastern.

The United States Equestrian Federation (USEF), the national governing body for equestrian sport in the United States, disallows action devices in the show ring for all recognized national breed affiliates. The AVMA and the AAEP commend the USEF for this rule and urge the USDA-APHIS to adopt similar restrictions for Tennessee Walking Horses.

Performance packages (also called stacks or pads), made of plastic, leather, wood, rubber and combinations of these materials, are attached below the sole of the horse's natural hoof and have a metal band that runs around the hoof wall to maintain them in place. Performance packages add weight to the horse's foot, causing it to strike with more force and at an abnormal angle to the ground. They also facilitate the concealment of items that apply pressure to the sole of the horse's hoof. Pressure from these hidden items produces pain in the hoof so that the horse lifts its feet faster and higher in an exaggerated gait.

Because the inhumane practice of soring Tennessee Walking Horses has continued 40 years after passage of the Horse Protection Act, and because the industry has been unable to make substantial progress in eliminating this abusive practice, the AVMA and the AAEP believe a ban on action devices and performance packages is necessary to protect the health and welfare of the horse.