



Horses that live and work in urban environments can face some unique conditions that impact their safety, health and well-being. Precautions should be taken to address hazards such as pollution, climatic extremes, and physical stresses (e.g., ground surface hardness, load factors).

TYPES OF URBAN WORK HORSES

Horses that commonly work in urban environments include mounted patrols and carriages for hire.

Mounted Patrol Unit Horses:

Regular patrols by mounted patrol units can be useful in busy urban areas. Their officers have better visibility, increased mobility over foot patrols and squad vehicles, and a strength multiplier effect (one mounted patrol officer might be the equivalent of 10 officers on foot). Because horses also tend to have a calming effect on people in tense situations, they also have benefits for crowd management.

Proper management of mounted patrol units can be expensive and time-consuming. Mounted officers must not only successfully complete comprehensive initial training sessions, but must maintain their competence through regular, in-service training. The horses in the mounted patrol units must have calm temperament and must also undergo extensive specialized training. Maintaining mounted patrols is not inexpensive. In addition to training costs, these horses need to be stabled, fed, outfitted with equipment and provided with veterinary and farrier care.

Carriage for Hire Horses:

Carriage and taxi horses can add nostalgia and romance to a trip or event. In addition to the cities that are well-known for their carriage horse industry (e.g., New York City, NY; Charleston, SC), carriage horses can be found in many other

places in the United States (e.g., Mackinac Island, MI; San Francisco, CA; Chicago, IL; Houston, TX) and around the world (e.g., Paris, France; Sydney, Australia; Campos do Jordão, Brazil; Killarney, Ireland).

Similar to mounted patrol unit horses, carriage horses must have an appropriate temperament, be trained (or conditioned) for their work along with their drivers, be kept in good condition (e.g., stabled, fed, groomed), outfitted with equipment and provided with veterinary and farrier care. However, because carriage horses have the added stress of pulling a load, they have a few distinct concerns that must be addressed. Work horses are typically draft breeds. These breeds have a low incidence of navicular disease in general, however heavy traction may increase the risk of developing navicular disease. Equipment must be properly fitted to the individual horse to avoid harness sores. Additionally, the work of pulling a load puts carriage horses at an increased risk of heat stroke during warm weather. To lessen this risk a maximum temperature should be set and horses should not be worked when the temperature reaches this threshold. Finally, carriage horses are at risk of collisions with motor vehicles in busy urban areas. Carriages should be well-maintained and outfitted with lighting for safety and visibility, and curfews and road standards for carriage routes should be set. Appropriate licensing standards for carriage horse drivers should be established and enforced by local authorities.

GENERAL CHALLENGES

Hooves:

Urban work horses spend a great deal of time on paved streets, making hoof care critical. Urban work horses should be shod specifically for work on paved surfaces. Periodic turnout on soft surfaces such as sand or pasture, preferably unshod, helps maintain hoof health by avoiding atrophy of the frog (the spongy portion of the bottom of the hoof) and facilitating hoof circulation.

Air Quality:

Adequate ventilation of stables is critical for good respiratory health. Horses that spend a significant amount of time stabled in poorly-ventilated environments may develop respiratory issues, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, from long-term inhalation of hay dust contaminated with mold and fungi. While we know that air pollution is a concern, at this time it is unknown how much of a detriment it is to horse health.

To Learn More:

www.avma.org/urbanhorses

American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP)

aaep.mediamarketers.com/position-statement-horses-urban-environments-i-326.html

Emergency Services:

Due to dense traffic in the areas where urban horses work, it can be difficult to reach a horse that needs emergency veterinary care. Therefore, clear arrangements with a veterinary practice to provide emergency on-site care should be made in advance.

MANAGEMENT AND OVERSIGHT

Individual jurisdictions should develop requirements concerning work hours, workloads and living conditions (shelter, food, water, etc.), training for both driver/officer and horse, health care (at least annual examination by competent equine veterinarians for condition, freedom from lameness or disease, and appropriateness of living conditions), and safety. Emergency care provisions, including guidelines for euthanasia, should be clear, appropriate to the venue and enforced by legitimate humane or animal control professionals.

