Increasingly, horse event organisers are re-evaluating their traditional committee roles and updating tasks to be undertaken when organising an event.

Community expectations about animal welfare are changing, society in general has higher expectations about animal-related safe incident and accident responses and organisers must take into account the perceived or real high-level emotional value that owners attach to their horses.

The following provides guidance on planning considerations and volunteer training for a horse event organising committee. It focuses primarily on the horse aspect as human first aid or ambulance medical response is generally well understood.

Caring for People

In a volunteer group of horse event organisers it is important to clarify the skills that exist in the group to effectively manage an incident and to identify, through a range of scenarios, when emergency services need to be called in.

As a guide:-

- **Minor Incidents** are those up to and including human or horse minor first aid treatment by on-site personnel
- **Serious Incidents** include those that require one or more emergency services and/or a veterinarian to be called in
- **Major Incidents** involve life-threatening injury of a human or horse

At the very minimum each horse event needs a human First Aid officer and a dedicated area for First Aid treatment where a patient can lie down, rest and recover from minor injuries. First Aid services often provide their own van or vehicle if advance notice is given. Many horse event organising committees will determine that an ambulance is required to be on site before an event can commence.

Briefing the first aid service (A volunteer, St John’s First Aid or Ambulance) on the type of event, venue facilities and number of people expected on the grounds is important.
Caring for Horses

For various reasons, the horse incident response has often been less considered. What will your horse event committee do if a serious or major horse or human incident occurred?

Over recent times, skills and knowledge are being gained by State Emergency Service volunteers and the RPSCA in safe horse-related incident management and rescue or recovery. Increased urbanisation, resulting in a loss of large animal handling skills within the emergency services, is fortunately seeing a reversal through applied technical training and the establishment of SES specialist units made up of volunteers with horse skills.

In South Australia, the RPSCA has a large animal rescue trailer with maintained and tested equipment that is ready for deployment. In the future, it is hoped further sets can be available more evenly distributed across the State.

Attempting more complex incident responses, for example extraction from a cross-country fence or a serious overturned horse float accident, requires specialist equipment, training and knowledge.

Does your committee have the skills to manage the scene safely and rescue the horse without further injuring the horse or any people?

In a UK study, a tiny 4-10% of large animal rescues were deemed successful whereby the act of incident management or rescue did not further maim, severely injure or kill the animal. Since technical large animal rescue training has been introduced the success rate has risen to 96% (P. Baker 2006)*

Horse owners are highly likely to become injured during and after an incident in an effort to help their horse. While veterinarians have excellent animal care training, they are unlikely to have received training in incident scene control, triage, equipment logistics or crowd control.

Therefore, it is unfair to expect or assume your horse event veterinarian is there to do anything other than treat horses.

Event organisers should consider appointing a horse welfare officer for each event, even though a veterinarian may be present. The advantages of creating this role and having an identified officer are that:

- Welfare is a priority
- Promoting your events horse welfare policies may help attract sponsors
- One person can provide information on solutions to current non-clinical problems that may compromise horse welfare, freeing any veterinary personnel to focus on clinical incidents
- One person can liaise with veterinarians from one event to the next and provide continuity over time on the most likely need for intervention
- Records can be kept of incidents that accrue over time
Responding to an Incident

With these thoughts in place, let’s have a look at what a small-to-medium horse event with low numbers of spectators might need to consider:

- Key roles for first response horse event volunteers
- Equipment Officer and equipment list
- Practise of an incident response
- Working with emergency services

A horse show committee typically has a few people doing many different jobs. In the normal course of a day, this is probably alright until something goes wrong. When selecting volunteers, try to ensure that important event roles, such as a judge or chief steward, can continue to function and keep the event on track whilst an incident is being managed, should that be the decision of the organising committee.

Some events, like those held on an oval, will most likely stop operating until the incident is managed. Other events, such as an endurance ride, may be in a position to continue during an incident response.

All volunteers for these listed roles need to be adults. It is not appropriate to ask juniors to place themselves in potentially dangerous situations if a horse is in distress.

Key Roles

Horse Event Incident Controller (IC): This is a critical role. This person is in charge of the incident scene; therefore you need someone who has been trained in incident response and scene management. The Incident Controller role oversees safety,
operations, planning and logistics or works closely with others who have been delegated to undertake one or more of these roles. In the case of a Serious or Major Incident, the horse event IC will hand over to the emergency services IC on their arrival.

Immediately an incident occurs, the IC will assess the scene, identify risks, secure the area, appoint a horse handler for each horse involved, and determine if it is just first aid, or the ambulance, police or veterinarian that is required. The IC will also advise the event manager to stop the horse event as a whole or just one particular section, depending on the type and location of the incident.

The IC will request that screens are put in place around a horse that is down or visibility injured.

For horse event organisers, consider inviting a suitable local SES or off-duty police officer, army officer or other trained person to volunteer for this role with your event. You will need someone who is ready to help you plan and prepare for managing a potential incident.

The person will not be involved in tedious organising detail such as show class programming or ordering ribbons but will need to be free to coordinate key responses with the event executive. They may be expected to organise specific event incident-planning sessions and, if possible, a training session at the event site itself.

Remember, the welfare of people comes before that of horses.

**Incident Control Admin Support:** This person has access to information about the owner of the horse, the rider’s personal details and next of kin contact details. They will have copies of any incident plans, site plans showing access/egress points, caterers and volunteers’ contact numbers – in other words, all the administrative information related to the event.

For minor incidents not requiring emergency services’ attendance, this person will work under the direction of the IC, supporting communication by relaying any messages, including public safety messages, to the ringmaster, PA system or stewards.

Consider putting all event information on an iPad, charged and ready for use in the field. Event radios, mobile phones and other communication options are essential.

**Horse Event Safety Officer:** This person works under the direction of the IC to ensure people remain in the incident safety zones and, where possible, wear personal protective equipment (at the very least, riding helmets). Volunteers can be appointed on the day to support a Safety Officer with crowd control and incident zone boundary identification if required. In the case of a Serious Incident, the Horse Event Safety Officer will hand over to the emergency services Safety Officer on their arrival.

**Veterinary Support:** This is a volunteer who will assist the veterinarian by carrying his bag and/or equipment and taking care of his drugs and tools while he is attending a Serious Incident. This includes holding loaded syringes and disposing of used hypodermic needles in a sharps container. Previous veterinary nurse training is
useful but not required. An ability to follow instructions from the IC and the veterinarian is essential.

**Nominated Horse Handler:** The nominated Horse Handler is an experienced person who is able to follow instructions instantly and work as part of a team. This person must be identified and nominated in advance of the event. With minor incidents, the Horse Handler is on hand to lead the horse back to its rider or to the float area. In more serious incidents the Horse Handler will work under the direction of the Incident Controller as part of a large team of emergency responders. A webbing or cotton head collar and very long lead are part of the Horse Handler’s equipment.

The nominated Horse Handler in a Serious Incident or Major Incident is not the owner/rider who may also be injured or emotional. In these incidents the owner is required to observe changes in the horse’s behaviour or condition and feed this information to the veterinarian and IC.

**Incident Reporter:** This person records aspects of the incident scene: the response, people involved in the incident, weather, time of day and general observations. This information will support a post-event incident report, investigation or insurance claim and can be evaluated by the committee post event to look for ways to make improvements.

**Photographer:** This person photographically records all aspects of the incident scene, the response and the surrounding aspects (sun, ground surface, hazards) to support information collected by the Incident Reporter. Ideally the reporter and photographer are two different people, but often this is not possible.

**Horse Ambulance and Driver:** Modern horse ambulances allow recumbent horses to be loaded and lie flat in the vehicle. Amongst many other features, they are equipped with an on-board sling, on-board winch, skids, exterior flood lights, veterinary equipment and fridges to keep veterinary drugs at the right temperature.

Most horse events will only have access to a regular four wheel drive and float. The inside fittings of the float will need to be easily removed. Ideally the owner/driver volunteer should not have their own horse at the event.

**Horse Welfare Officer:** Increasingly, Horse Welfare Officers are being appointed for events and horse activities. Whilst their role is broad they will observe the incident response and management and provide advice if any welfare issues become apparent. Their biggest role may very well be after the incident to ensure that the horse is cared for appropriately and taken home or to an equine clinic in a timely manner.

**Human Welfare Officer:** The appointed Member Protection Officer/Child Safe Officer for the club or event should have the skills to also be on standby to provide general human welfare services. In consultation with the IC, they may call in further professional counselling support if needed when a serious or major incident occurs.
Equipment Officer and Equipment: This volunteer will need to source a range of items to have ready to use should an incident occur:

1. High visibility vests, safety helmets and disposable gloves
2. Webbing/cotton head collar and very long lead with extra-strong snap hook for the handler
3. Several tarpaulins or sheets for lying equipment out on, or to use for shade or shelter. At least one must be big enough to fully cover a deceased horse
4. Blankets for wrapping people in, protecting a horse from further injury, padding and protection uses
5. Lengths of 9M x 150mm webbing rescue straps for dragging a horse or rolling a horse over
6. A lunging whip for pulling rescue straps under a recumbent horse’s body
7. A couple of poles with hooks, brooms or a walking stick with a hook top to help manoeuvre ropes or items near a horse that may be thrashing about or in a confined space.
8. Containment fencing
9. Screen/s
10. Yards to hold a horse for treatment or for other reasons
11. Water, water container and feed on standby in case a horse needs to stay overnight
12. Water in a jerry can to take to a site
13. Torches and battery powered radio
Practise an Incident Response

Ideally, event organisers should build relationships with local emergency services, many of whom are volunteers from within the community in which the event is being held. These are the people you will be working with in an emergency and they can also help train your event volunteers.

Set a time and date for the training session, preferably on site where the event is to be held. This way you may pick up that there are mobile phone black spots, hoses may be too short or the glare of the sun hinders clear vision. A training session that is close to a real life event will help to keep people engaged and constructive. Invite your event veterinarian and the person in charge of the horse ambulance to attend.

During the training, discuss how you may work as a team with emergency services in an incident response.

“Bruce” A training mannequin similar to this model are will soon be available in Australia thanks to sponsorship organised through the Australian Equine Veterinary Association
Basic Training for Horse Event Organisers

Training courses are now able to be arranged in Australia for horse event organisers.

These courses will typically include:

1. Overview of common horse event incidents and what TLAER\(^1\) is
2. Supporting a horse event Incident Controller to manage a scene
3. Monitoring the vital signs of a horse
4. Working with emergency services
5. Handling horses in stressful situations
6. Forward assist, backwards drag, assisting a cast horse
7. How to get a horse up, how to keep a recumbent horse down
8. How to erect horse screens quickly and when to use them
9. Containing a loose horse
10. Guide to completing an incident report
11. General discussion: decisions that an Event Organiser may need to make around holding, postponing, altering or cancelling an event due to an incident.

References:

*Equine Emergency Rescue*  MaryAnne Leighton 2010


Course enquiries for South Australia - Horse SA  [www.horsesa.asn.au](http://www.horsesa.asn.au)


\(^1\) Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue