

EQUINE DISPOSAL GUIDE FOR MARYLAND HORSE OWNERS

By University of Maryland Extension (updated by Olivia Wood from UMD's December 2014 article)

Owning an equine means you, as the owner, accept responsibility for the animal's health and well-being. However, the time may come when your equine will suffer injury, sickness, old age, lameness, or dangerous behaviors that will result in the trying task of deciding what is best for your equine. In some cases, the kindest and most humane decision is to have the animal euthanized. Your veterinarian can guide you in deciding if euthanasia is appropriate.

Having to euthanize an equine is a topic not often discussed, so deciding when, where, and how is not easy. Making such a decision is often emotionally taxing for an equine owner.

Management and disposal of deceased animals is a normal part of raising livestock. Proper equine disposal is important whether the cause of the death was expected or unexpected.

Having a plan and the necessary information regarding on- and off-farm disposal options will help make the circumstances of disposing of an equine less stressful. In general, be sure you know the acceptable disposal options available in your county. Always check the local ordinances and with county agencies to ensure that you use proper disposal methods. If an equine carcass must be removed from the farm, it should be covered completely with a tarp during transport.

Importance of Proper Disposal of Equine Carcasses

It is important to properly dispose of an equine carcass in a timely manner for the following reasons:

- Health - the timely removal of a dead animal limits the spread of disease and prevents other animals from becoming sick.
- Environmental Protection - timely disposal protects waterways and groundwater from contamination by limiting potential toxins that may be released from a decomposing animal.
- Appearance - neighbors and the general public may find the sight of a deceased equine unappealing or even distressful, leaving a negative opinion of the equine owner's operation and management skills.

Once an equine has died, a disposal method should be chosen that is most acceptable to the equine owner, does not spread disease, does not endanger public health and does not negatively impact the environment.

State and Local Authorities

Be sure to check with State and local authorities before selecting a disposal method as permitted disposal methods vary throughout the State. State and local agencies that may be contacted include but are not limited to:

- Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA)
- Maryland Department of Health (MDH)
- Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)
- County Animal Control offices

In addition, it is strongly encouraged to check with county zoning prior to carcass disposal within a county or town limits. Remember, laws and regulations can change, so always double check local and state regulations before disposing of an equine carcass for any changes or updates that may have occurred.

Don't forget! Check your county codes and regulations for current equine disposal options in your area.

Maryland counties generally follow State regulations pertaining to animal carcass disposal. According to the Code of Regulations (COMAR) for Maryland, disposal regulations for the State are as follows:

- 3-108 Maryland Code - When any animal is slaughtered under the provisions of the subtitle, the owner may dispose of the carcass or any part of it, the hides, and offal, pursuant to the departmental rules and regulations, and in a manner that does not tend to spread disease or endanger the public health.
- 3-109 Maryland Code - The owner of any domestic animal that has died of a contagious or infectious disease shall bury it to a depth of at least three feet or burn it within three hours before sunset of the day following the discovery of the animal.

For current information, visit the Maryland Department of Agriculture's website www.mda.maryland.gov or contact MDA directly at 410-841-5700.

Maryland Law

Maryland law requires disposal of a deceased equine within 48 hours of its death. If an owner or manager does not dispose of a carcass properly, the Maryland Health Department will

become involved.

Here in Maryland, the following options for disposing of an equine carcass are available:

- Composting
- Cremation/incineration
- Burial

Allowing the carcass to decay in a pasture or an open area is not encouraged in Maryland. Generally, there is not enough land available away from neighbors or the public to make this a viable option for equine owners. A naturally decomposing carcass may contaminate surface and groundwater. Chemical euthanasia also poses a risk of poisoning scavenging wildlife, livestock, and pets.

Regardless of the method chosen by the equine owner or manager, the carcass must be disposed of within 48 hours according to the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). MDA also specifies that any animal that died of an infectious or reportable disease must be disposed of according to MDA guidelines.

Composting

Composting is considered the most environmentally safe disposal method, providing the composting process is done correctly. Composting is cost efficient, kills pathogens, is biosecure, environmentally sound, and easily accomplished.

The composting process is carried out using specific moisture and temperature levels during set periods of time. The time required varies depending on the size of the equine. Larger animals require more time.

Composting requires carbon sources, such as woodchips or shavings. The composting site should be located in a well-drained area away from wells and other water sources. The carbon source will completely breakdown the equine carcass in addition to providing organic material that can be used as a soil amendment. Owners may use this material in planting a "memorial tree" for the deceased equine.

Composting can be done any time of the year, regardless of the size of equine.

For more information on how to set up a proper composting site, see the sidebar in this article.

Cremation or Incineration

Incineration is the thermal destruction of a carcass by fuel such as propane or natural gas, also known as burning. While an incinerator may be installed on a farm for large animals, it

Equine End of Life Resources

For a complete and current list of equine end of life resources such as removal companies and crematories, please contact the Maryland Equine Transition Service at 410-970-6474 or visit mdequinetransition.org