

Winchester Riding Club



British Horse Society reports increase in welfare calls during big freeze.

The British Horse Society has seen an increase in the number of welfare cases reported over the last few days and is urging owners to take a few simple steps to keep their horses happy and healthy during the current cold snap.

BHS Senior Executive (Welfare) Lee Hackett said: *We have received huge numbers of calls to our welfare line reporting horses in distress. Although well meaning, quite a number of them have turned out to be unfounded, as horses generally cope quite well with cold weather, even though they may look quite miserable! However there are some steps that owners can take to ensure that their horses don't become genuine welfare concerns.*

Horses generate a lot of heat from fibre digestion which is one of the key reasons that they can handle cold weather. The BHS recommends that a constant supply of forage (for example hay) is available to all horses, even those turned out in snow covered fields. Horses that are confined to their stables should have their hard feed reduced and forage levels increased in order to keep them warm and prevent them from putting on weight.

A constant supply of water is essential, but buckets and troughs will freeze over very quickly in such cold weather so they need to be checked, and the ice broken, as regularly as possible throughout the day. The BHS has received reports that some vets have seen an increase in the number of colic cases as thirsty horses drink large quantities of freezing cold water. To prevent this, make sure that the horse has access to water at all times, so he doesn't feel the need to drink large amounts in one go, and add a little warm water to their buckets where possible.

Shelter is paramount, and not just from the snow. Wind chill makes a big difference so there should always be somewhere for a horse to escape the gales. Rugs should not be seen as an alternative to shelter but they are important, particularly for older and finer horses. Unclipped, healthy native bred ponies will often manage fine without a rug as long as adequate shelter and forage is available.

The BHS Welfare Department is happy to talk to any horse owners concerned about how best to manage their horses in the cold weather and they can be reached on 01926 707804 or at welfare@bhs.org.uk

For further information and pictures, please contact: Alison Coleman, The British Horse Society, 01926 707737 or communications@bhs.org.uk.

*contributed by Fiona Honeyman
9 January 2010*