

## **AU HORSE CENTER SAFETY GUIDELINES**

**GENERAL** - Horses are prey animals which will run from anything they perceive as a possible predator. If they are "trapped" by the perceived predator (human, dogs, blowing paper, etc.), they will kick, strike, or bite in self-defense. Therefore, it is important to let a horse know where you are, what you intend to do and then proceed calmly and deliberately. Horses also are very curious. It is important to keep doors and gates securely fastened and to keep pastures free of dangerous objects to prevent injury to curious horses.

**ATTIRE** - long pants; sturdy boots with a heel. No steel toed boots are allowed because horses weigh more than a steel toe cap can support! Gloves may be helpful. Wearing an ASTM approved equestrian helmet when working around or riding horses is always recommended.

### **APPROACHING & CATCHING**

- 1) When approaching a horse, speak to the horse and watch for the horse to turn its head or ear to acknowledge your presence.
- 2) Approach the horse at an angle to its shoulder if possible. Avoid approaching the horse from directly in front or behind. These are blind spots, and the horse may be startled when you touch it or suddenly reappear in its visual field.
- 3) Put lead line around the horse's neck and slip on halter quietly.
- 4) Ask horses in stalls to turn and face you before you enter the stall.
- 5) Keep your head and eyes down when trying to catch a horse that is avoiding you. If the horse is trying to run over you to escape capture, make eye contact and become "big and threatening" until the horse backs down. If the horse still insists on running over you, get out of its way!

### **LEADING**

- 1) Lead with a lead rope attached to the horse's halter. Do not lead with only the halter, only the neck collar, or only a lead line around the horse's neck.
- 2) Lead from the horse's left (near) side if possible. Hold the lead line with your right hand 4-6 inches from the snap and make the horse walk with its throatlatch at your shoulder. Hold the excess lead loosely in your left hand. Make sure that excess lead is not dragging on the ground or wrapped around your hand or body.
- 3) When leading the horse through gates or doorways make sure the opening is big enough for the horse to get through without catching its side or hips. Hitting their body makes some horses panic and jump through the opening. Make sure you go through the gate first, so if the horse panics you will not be run over.
- 4) Always turn the horse to the right - away from you - if possible. If you have to turn the horse to the left, step backwards slightly as you turn so your feet stay out of the way of the horse's feet.
- 5) When turning horses out in a pasture or pen, lead the horse through the gate, turn it to face you and the gate (your back is to the gate), quietly remove the halter and **STEP BACK** in case the horse turns and kicks. Allow the horse to quietly walk away from you.
- 6) Be careful leading horses around cars or machinery. They can panic if they brush against metal.

## **HANDLING**

- 1) Keep one hand on the horse and speak to the horse often while you are working around it, so that it knows where you are.
- 2) Stay aware of where you are and where the horse's attention is focused (keep an eye on the horse's ear position and eyes). Keep your feet out of the way of the horse's feet.
- 3) Stay close to the horse's shoulder (safe zone) while working around it. If you need to move to the opposite side of a tied horse, speak to the horse, put your hand on the horse's hindquarters and walk around the horse close to its hindquarters. This prevents the horse from hitting you with a full power kick. Never step over or duck under the tie rope. You will be squashed if the horse gets frightened.
- 4) When you must work on the horse's lower legs use a squatting position. It takes too long to get up from a kneeling position if the horse acts up. Be careful to keep your head clear of the horse's knees, hocks, feet and head.
- 5) Do not make sudden movements or noises around horses.
- 6) Do not stand directly in front of or behind the horse.
- 7) Remove horses from stalls when cleaning the stall.
- 8) Remove halters when turning horses loose in a pasture, pen or stall.
- 9) Be aware of the mare's attitude when handling young foals.
- 10) Do not handle stallions during breeding procedures until you have been instructed on safe handling practices for stallions.
- 11) If you are having trouble handling a horse, ask for assistance.

## **TYING**

- 1) Use a quick release knot! Tie the horse at its eye level, with approximately 2 to 2.5 feet of line between the horse and the tie post. Make sure you tie the horse in a safe area, free of hazards, to something it cannot move or break.
- 2) Carry a pocket knife that can cut lead lines in an emergency.
- 3) Be sure that horses are trained to tie before you tie them. If you are unsure if the horse has been taught to stand tied, do not tie it. Never tie a horse up by its reins.
- 4) Untie the horse before bridling or before doing anything aversive to the horse (e.g. administering dewormer, giving injections, etc.).
- 5) If a horse panics and pulls back when tied, go a safe distance (12-15 feet) **BEHIND** the horse and shoo it forward. Never go to its head thinking that you will untie it. You will only get squashed.
- 6) Do not leave a tied horse unattended.

## **TRAILERING**

- 1) Be aware of other horses and their reactions if loading more than one horse in a trailer.
- 2) Always close the trailer door before tying the horse and untie the horse before opening the trailer door. The exception is a long, multiple horse trailer in which you can safely tie a horse in the front of the trailer without it being able to step out of the trailer while tied.
- 3) When loading horses, be careful to avoid getting your body or body parts trapped between the horse and the trailer or between moving parts of the trailer.
- 4) Make sure the trailer is properly and securely fastened to the tow vehicle before loading the horse or driving away.

## **FEEDING**

- 1) Do not allow horses to push against you or the feed bucket and snatch bites of feed before you empty the feed into the feeder. This teaches horses to run over you. If group fed horses will not respect your space, take a longe whip with you when feeding and convince them that anywhere you can reach with the whip is off-limits to them.
- 2) Be aware of all the horses in the field and interactions between horses while you are feeding or working with an individual horse in the field. When feeding horses in stalls, be aware of how the horse you are feeding is reacting to stable mates in nearby stalls.

## **SOME HUMAN HEALTH CONCERNS**

- 1) Horses are large, highly mobile and unpredictable. This makes them dangerous to work around. Stay alert when working around the horses and pay particular attention to their body language (ear, eyes, posture) to avoid being injured. There is no way you can overpower a horse. You must stay alert and out-think them to be safe.
- 2) Horses can harbor tetanus bacteria in their gut and spread this in the soil. You should be current on tetanus vaccination when working around horse facilities.
- 3) Some people are allergic to horse dander and many of the allergens that are inherent to horse facilities – grass, hay, dust, insects, etc. If you are allergic to horses or associated allergens discuss solutions with your health care provider.
- 4) Always be cautious around horses exhibiting a change in behavior, depression, fever or other signs of illness. Horses can contract encephalitic diseases such as West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis, but they are considered “dead end hosts” for most of these diseases, i.e., they cannot transmit the disease. They can contract and transmit rabies. Adult horses at the AU Horse Center are vaccinated for rabies.