

The Current Status of Rescue

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The subject of “Unwanted horses” is gaining national attention. This is probably due to 1) an increased awareness of rescue organizations and their activities and 2) both federal and state legislation aimed at banning the slaughter of horses for human consumption. A better understanding of what a horse rescue is, how they operate, and how to select a good rescue encourages horse enthusiasts and the general public to support and volunteer with rescue organizations.

Important Rescue terms:

- Private rescue: Individual, family, or small group who rescues horses. They fund the rescue primarily out of their own pocket but may do some fundraising and get gifts from others who want to help. Private rescuers are technically operating a business and should report all income from the rescue (adoption fees, fundraising income, etc.) as personal income on their taxes.
- Non-profit rescues. Organizations that have filed articles of incorporation or association with their state. Directors and officers of corporation are protected from being held financially accountable for debts incurred by the corporation.
- Tax-exempt organization. File paperwork with the IRS to become tax-exempt. Donations to tax-exempt organizations are deductible, and tax-exempt organizations do not pay tax on income related to their charitable purpose. They're also held to a standard of “public accountability” – meaning their financial statements, bylaws, etc. must be available to the public.
- Sanctuaries. Take in horses and other equines and keep them for the remainder of life.
- Adoption program. Bring in horses and other equines, evaluate and rehabilitate them (if needed) and place them into loving adoptive homes.

Rescue statistics:

- No trade association, regulatory agency, etc. for rescues
- IRS lists 109 non-profit, tax-exempt 'equine rescues', 'horse rescues', and 'equine humane societies' in the US – does not include animal shelters who take in horses or farm animal rescue
- Countless private rescues. No guidelines on who can call themselves a private rescue, so there's no good way to know how many there are.
- Rescue growth. Each year, dozens or more new rescues spring up across the country. Unfortunately, many rescues also close their doors annually.

Rescues perform a variety of activities. They take in horses and other equines from various sources such as auctions or feedlots, off the track horses, donated or owner surrendered horses, and abandoned horses or those that have been removed from their owners by law enforcement. Rescues also provide education in the form of training and riding clinics, seminars on horse care topics, and printed information – they do this in the hopes of preventing neglect due to ignorance. When an owner has a horse that they fear they cannot keep due to illness, injury, lameness, or behavioral or training problem, some rescues are able to help the owner find a veterinarian or other equine professional who can help the owner solve his/her problems and keep the horse. Rescuers may also work with law enforcement officers to investigate reports of neglect or abuse and/or take in horses that have been removed from their owners due to neglect/abuse or found abandoned.

Rescues need *your* help! Most rescues run solely off volunteer manpower, and others may have only one or two paid employees. If you have time to groom, help feed, train, or otherwise handle the horses – rescues need you. If you have legal skills, accounting skills, fundraising skills, promotion/public relations skills, etc – rescues need you. If you can foster, adopt, or assist with trailering – rescues need you. Rescues also need your donations – there's no government funding for rescues, so they depend on fundraisers and donations to bring in the money to pay vet, farrier, feed, and other bills.

Unfortunately just like in every industry, there are a few unscrupulous people in the rescue world. I've been involved in removing horses from a "rescue" – they clearly could not care for the horses they brought in. They may have gotten into rescue with the best of intentions but gotten in over their head. Sometimes, people get into rescue hoping to make a "fast buck" at the expense of the public and the horses they claim to help. Luckily, there are far more good rescuers out there – and there are ways to select a good rescue and avoid the bad ones.

Screening potential rescues:

- Talk to the Rescue – and Ask Question
 - Why are you involved in rescue?
 - What are your rescue goals?
 - What is your biggest rescue success?
 - How many grants have you applied for? What grants have you been awarded?
 - How do you fund the rescue?
 - How much time do you spend with the horses daily?
 - Where do your horses come from?
 - How much has your rescue grown in the past year? Since you began rescuing?
 - How many equines are adopted each year?
 - How many adopted equines are returned to you?
 - Describe your horse experience.
- Review corporate documents
 - Financial information - 990s
 - IRS Determination letter – or visit www.irs.gov or www.guidestar.org to check the organization's tax-exempt status
 - Articles of Incorporation
 - Bylaws

- Visit the Facility
 - Is the facility serviceable and safe?
 - Are the horses being cared for?
 - How do the volunteers interact with the horses?
- For Rescues with Foster Programs
 - Review the fostering policy
 - How foster horses are assigned to homes?
 - What happens if a foster horse isn't working out?
 - Does anyone check up on foster homes?
 - Talk to some foster homes
- Review the Rescue's Policies
- Check References
 - Veterinarians
 - Farriers
 - Donors
 - Adopters
 - Volunteers

For more information on how to select a good rescue, read "Reliable Rescue or Shameless Scam" in EQUUS' October 2004 issue.

Or contact me at jenn@bluebonnetequine.org or via our website at <http://www.bluebonnetequine.org>.

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