

Report on the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition's  
Footage from Two Canadian Horse Slaughter Plants

After reviewing the footage from Bouvry Exports in Fort Macleod, Alberta, I have many serious concerns regarding the welfare of the horses. As a society, we have decided that we can use other species for many purposes; however, we have also decided that when these animals are killed, it must be done quickly and humanely. The Criminal Code of Canada states that humans must not inflict unnecessary pain and suffering on non-human animals. As a veterinarian who has worked in the animal welfare field for twenty years, I feel confident that the footage from the Bouvry plant shows levels of suffering that are unacceptable.

There are many factors that create a horrific experience for these horses.

1. The loud music would be unfamiliar, and therefore cause anxiety.
2. The floor was wet and slippery, which makes animals, especially horses, very uncomfortable.
3. The kill-box was too large for many of the horses, so when they started to panic before the shot, or if the first shot just wounded them, they could flip themselves around, or get twisted and stuck.
4. Far too often, the shooter was not able to render the animal unconscious on his first shot. Then, the horse experiences great pain for a prolonged period before the next shots are fired. It often took 3 or 4 bullets before the horse lay still. There is no excuse for any time to elapse between shots, and sometimes it was several minutes. The onus is on the shooter to stun the animal as quickly as possible.
5. The next step is shackling the back leg, and hanging the animal to bleed it. Before this is done, the animal must be unconscious. I never saw one attempt on the tapes to make sure of this. It is a simple matter to check the corneal reflex, and the guidelines insist that it be done.
6. Too often, the horse would be hung up, and then show conscious movement, and then have to be shot again, sometimes several times.
7. Because there were no attempts to ensure unconsciousness, it is possible horses are dying by being bled out, which is inhumane.

The American Veterinary Medical Association published a document titled "The AVMA Panel on Euthanasia". It is considered the gold standard on humane ways to kill an animal. It clearly states that there should be little or no anxiety before death. The death must be quick. The death must be painless. It is clear that these tapes from Bouvry show an unacceptable level of suffering.

Regarding the Richelieu plant in Massueville, Quebec, although the level of suffering does not appear to be as high as at Bouvry, I still have concerns.

1. When the first shot fails to render the horse unconscious, there is too long a span before the next shot is fired.
2. I never witnessed anyone checking to ensure the horse was unconscious before being dumped out of the kill-box, which may lead to the horse being shackled, hung, and bled while still conscious.

Respectfully submitted by Dr. Mary Richardson, DVM, April 17, 2010

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