

Hidden Hazards

Approximately 80-percent of all laceration injuries are preventable.

by Summer Best.

Take a look at your horse property. See any hidden hazards? Random pieces of roofing tin strewn anywhere? Or perhaps a horse trailer parked in the pasture? Little bolts or nails sticking out in the stall? A piece of barbed-wire here and there?

Horses are injury-prone enough on their own. When we allow debris to accumulate in their living areas, we're asking for a trouble.

"The majority of laceration injuries are preventable," says Dr. Jennifer Fowinkle of Central Florida Equine Hospital in Sanford, Florida. "I would say that 80-percent of the laceration wounds I see could have been avoided. It's mostly a matter of owners using good sense - horse sense - and taking time to check things out before putting a horse in a situation."

The longer you are around horses, the more you get an eye for seeing potential hazards, Dr. Fowinkle says.

"Having debris in a field might seem like no big deal for a long time. Horses can be turned out for 10 or 15 years in a field with an old trailer, a truck or maybe a Bobcat parked out there.

"Horse owners think it's no big deal to have equipment in that pasture with their horses," she continues. "Then one day, the horse isn't looking where it's going, and it runs right into it."

Dr. Fowinkle sees six to 12 traumatic laceration injuries per year that could very possibly have been avoided.

by Jill Haight

Lacy Kittle's 26-year-old mare, "Sugar," is lucky to be alive after her February 1 run-in with the gooseneck horse trailer.

Shoulder Slice

February 1, 2005, seemed to be finishing up like any other day at Freddie's Feed & Seed in Mims, Florida. Lacy Kittles, who helps run the store with her mother, Barbara, left work around 6 p.m. and drove home to feed their horses. All was fairly routine until her 26-year-old mare, "Sugar," made a beeline for the gate.

"She actually got out and ran into the yard," Lacy remembers. "She didn't

want to be caught."

Lacy had some choice words to explain how she felt about the mare's antics at that moment. But what happened next was more than just an inconvenient little jaunt around the yard. The mare's mischievous moments soon turned into a horrible disaster.

"She was running," Lacy recalls of the moment. "She didn't want to be caught, and she plowed past me. Then she looked over at my mom as she was running, and she just slammed into the trailer."

Sugar's left shoulder hit the trailer first. The force was so powerful, she shoved the three-horse gooseneck a good 2 feet. Sugar's shoulder was torn wide open, and she had a wound that stretched all the way across her ribcage and dug a deep, scary hole into her hip.

"We saw her take a few trotting steps, then she started leaning like she might fall," Lacy says. "Then we just saw blood squirting everywhere. If we hadn't been there, she might have bled to death."

Lacy and her mother, Barbara, grabbed towels to begin applying pressure to the massive wound. They immediately called for Dr. Fowinkle, who was on the scene within an hour.

by Jill Haight

The left shoulder required the most stitches. Dr. Fowinkle spent several hours on the initial emergency wound.

"It was an L-shaped wound, about a foot and a half by a foot and a half, on the mare's left shoulder," Dr. Fowinkle explains. "She was lucky it didn't involve the bone."

Dr. Fowinkle worked on the mare for more than five hours. Drainage devices were inserted to keep Sugar's wound as dry as possible during the long healing process. Stints were applied to give support underneath the skin surface. Dr. Fowinkle applied six stitching packs - more than 50 stitches to the massive wounds.

Sugar was given antibiotics for one month, twice-daily cleaning and treatment of the wound, and stall rest. Many stitches did not hold, and parts of the flesh rotted, but today, she's out running and bucking in the pasture. Lacy feels that the mare will experience a full recovery. But her scars will be big ones. Six weeks after the accident, fluid still seeped from the hole in the mare's hip.

Had Sugar not escaped that day, the accident might never have happened. The trailer was parked by the barn - not in a pasture.

"I've met several people who have had horses get hurt just like this," Lacy says. "One horse broke its shoulder when it hit a trailer, and another horse injured its eye socket. We're just really lucky she didn't have any broken bones."

by Jill Haight

Sugar's left hip still has a large, circular puncture from the incident. Young horses are at a higher risk of injury from foreign objects in a pasture or stall, thanks to their higher energy levels and curiosity. Senior horses are still at risk, however. Sugar, at 26, has spent nearly all her life on Lacy and Barbara's property.

"Unfortunately, I see this sort of injury more often than I should, and many times, it is preventable," Dr. Fowinkle says.

A few avoidables

1. Barbed wire. "Barbed wire is made for cows, not for horses," Dr. Fowinkle says. "I can't tell you how many times I've run across horse injuries from barbed wire."
2. Metal barrels that have rusted through.
3. Tin roof pieces.
4. Garbage in fields.
5. Extruding bolts and nails in stalls, pastures and other horse areas.
6. Double-ended snaps that can injure a horse's eye. Always face the bolt side/snap side away from the horse's face when hanging buckets.
7. Fencing other than barbed wire that horses can lodge a foot through.
8. Stalls that horses can lodge a foot through. "Horses can kick through boards that are as close as 1 inch apart," Dr. Fowinkle says. "I have even seen a horse kick through boards that were flush with each other. Remember that when the horse kicks with that big thrust, the foot goes through the cracks, and the boards bend outward. Then, the horse's foot is stuck through the crack, and it can't pull back through."
9. Bungee-type cross-ties that stretch when horses pull back. These have a tendency to stretch all the way until the bungees break, flinging one end into the horses body, potentially causing major injury.
10. Parked trailers, trucks, tractors, etc. in fields or in any area that a

horse will be potentially running through.