

## **ESTABLISHING A QUARANTINE FACILITY FOR IMPORTED RACEHORSES**

Patricia M. Ellis

*Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Agriculture Victoria, 475/485 Mickleham Road, Attwood, Victoria 3049, Australia*

### **ABSTRACT**

There are concerns that uncontrolled expansion of international racing could increase the spread of serious infectious diseases of horses. Careful management of visiting racehorses from foreign countries minimises the risk of disease transmission to domestic horse populations. Equally, the same precautions reduce the risk that an infectious disease outbreak in the host country will compromise re-patriation of foreign horses. If satisfactory arrangements are in place, foreign animal health authorities will have confidence that horses can visit and be re-imported safely.

Separation of foreign horses from the host population is a recognised risk management strategy. Provided training and stabling facilities are suitable, separation need not be a disadvantage to visitors.

Exercise facilities at Government quarantine stations are usually inadequate to maintain competitive fitness in racehorses. If a country wishes to host an international race, a suitable facility for foreign horses has to be developed by the host racing authority. Access to a good training track is critical.

This paper presents key points to consider when establishing safe, convenient and secure quarantine facilities for foreign racehorses. Issues discussed include forward planning, quarantine considerations, location, security, design principles, facilities and equipment, hygiene, insect vector protection and operational procedures.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Prestigious invitation races in Japan, United States of America, Hong Kong and now Dubai are firmly established events on the international racing calendar. However, there are concerns that uncontrolled expansion of international racing could increase the spread of serious equine infectious diseases (Timoney 1994).

Racing authorities of countries participating in

the International Agreement on Breeding and Racing recognise this risk. Health requirements for foreign horses are outlined in Article 22 of this agreement (Anon 1992b) including a recommendation that "foreign horses should be stabled apart". Article 1 of the agreement requires that "veterinary and quarantine measures shall be common for foreign competitors and organised in such a way that they can in no case prejudice the horse's condition". Provided training and stabling facilities are suitable, separation need not be a disadvantage to visitors.

This paper presents key points which racing authorities have to consider when establishing a safe, convenient and secure quarantine or isolation facility for foreign racehorses.

### **FORWARD PLANNING**

When establishing a facility for international racehorses, adequate lead time and forward planning are essential. The design of the facilities will be influenced not only by the budget allocated, but the source and number of foreign invitees. There may be additional operational costs for official quarantine supervision and a security service. Close and continued liaison between racing and quarantine officials from an early stage is required to negotiate and resolve the many quarantine issues which may arise. Early consultation with an experienced international shipping agent about logistics and co-ordination of arrival times is also helpful.

### **QUARANTINE ISSUES**

The requirements of local quarantine authorities for temporary import of horses from various countries must be determined before construction commences. A period of official quarantine post arrival may be imposed in premises which have to meet strict standards. Alternatively, in some circumstances imported horses may be released from government control immediately and, in

others, isolation in a dedicated barn or separation from local horses by a distance barrier may be sufficient.

An additional consideration, often overlooked, is that quarantine protocols for return of horses to their country of origin have to be investigated. Some countries impose special conditions on the accommodation of their horses during residency in the host country. For instance, to return directly to the European Union (EU) within 30 days, without additional blood testing, EU horses have to be isolated from *all* other horses during their residency in the host country except at the actual time of racing. Multiple stable blocks may have to be constructed to cater for groups of horses from countries/regions of different health status.

Even if quarantine or isolation is not required by government authorities, separation of visiting horses is desirable. Racing authorities currently conducting international invitation races manage foreign horses in separate groups to minimise the risk of disease transmission to their domestic racing populations. Equally, the same precautions reduce the risk of an unexpected disease outbreak in the host country compromising participation or re-patriation of foreign horses. Prompt action by racing and animal health officials salvaged foreign participation in an International Festival at Arlington International Racecourse when an outbreak of equine viral arteritis occurred there in 1993 (Bork 1994). Initially there were concerns that the outbreak of equine morbillivirus in Queensland in September 1994 might prevent European horses travelling to Australia for the Melbourne Cup in November (Millar, personal communication). If satisfactory isolation arrangements are in place, foreign animal health authorities will have confidence that horses can visit and be re-imported safely.

It is also important to establish in advance if local or foreign quarantine authorities impose any special requirements on the preparation or management of visiting horses. For instance, because Australia is free from equine influenza, vaccination requirements for importation to Australia are more stringent than those required by racing authorities in Europe. Trainers of invited horses must be advised of any special vaccination requirements well in advance to ensure that horses are eligible for importation. The policies of the host country and source countries to horses positive to piroplasmiasis and to potential exposure to insect transmitted diseases must also be examined. In some instances, insect protection of premises may be compulsory and is, in any case, recommended as best practice to minimise risks of spread of arthropod-borne diseases. Visiting foreign trainers may request a local horse as a companion and

exercise partner. Therefore an acceptable protocol for the introduction of a local horse to the quarantine facility may have to be negotiated.

Quarantine policy on import of foreign foodstuffs, supplements and medications should also be established. Australia permits importation of small quantities of foreign feed for visiting horses provided it is gamma irradiated to minimise risks arising from plant pathogens and pests.

Careful attention has to be paid to arrival times and subsequent racing schedules. If local quarantine authorities impose post arrival quarantine (PAQ), the PAQ period for a group of horses is deemed to start from the time of entry of the last horse. Special stabling arrangements elsewhere may have to be made for horses which arrive early, complete PAQ and stay on for multiple engagements.

## LOCATION

The facility should be in an area free from serious endemic equine diseases. Stud or breeding premises are not suitable as quarantine authorities usually permit competition horses to travel without testing for venereal diseases. The location must be close to an international airport and convenient for access by quarantine and racing officials.

Most government operated quarantine premises do not have easy access to adequate training facilities where imported racehorses can maintain competitive fitness. If a country wishes to host an international race, the responsibility for establishing an approved quarantine facility rests with the local racing authority. Convenient access to a good training track is critical.

Quarantine requirements dictate the mandatory distance barrier from the domestic horse population which must be observed. However, in the interests of infectious disease control, wherever possible this should be maximised. In Australia no other equids are allowed to be "depastured, held or exercised within 100 metres of horses on the premises". If imported horses are stabled at an existing racecourse, it must be ascertained whether quarantine and racing authorities will permit normal race meetings to be conducted at the same time. Approval allows increased flexibility of dates of importation.

On a limited budget, cost-effective access to electricity, adequate water supply and sewage may be an important factor in finding a suitable site. Early consultation about the proposed location with local stakeholders such as nearby racehorse trainers, residents and the local municipality is recommended to determine whether any objections will be raised.

## **SECURITY**

The perimeter fence of the premises should deter entry by animals or unauthorised persons and, if not a wall, be screened to protect the privacy of visitors. Approved premises in Australia "must be surrounded by 2 secure stockproof fences at least 5 metres apart except where the wall of a building forms part of the perimeter". Arrangements must be made for 24 h supervision of the security and operation of the premises.

As well as operating as an approved quarantine facility, the premises will also operate as a training stable shared by multiple foreign trainers. Therefore due attention must be paid to security within the premises. To enable trainers to fulfil their obligations under the Rules of Racing, a lockable feed/tack storage area should be available for each trainer. Individual stables and turnout yards must be able to be locked.

As trainers often arrive just before an international race, their interests and privacy have to be protected by limiting access to those persons with official security passes and a genuine need to enter the premises, such as authorised stable staff, racing and quarantine officials, veterinarians and farriers. A Movement Control Register should be kept of persons entering the centre.

Control is enhanced if entry is via a single perimeter access point which is locked when not in use. Other access or service points can be locked permanently and their use controlled by security staff. As exercise sessions usually attract intense interest from the press and public, additional attention to security is necessary at these times.

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

If horses from a number of foreign countries will be visiting, construction of multiple units for horses from different countries or regions is recommended. The size of each block will be determined by the likely number of runners from each country. If a permanent facility is being established, variation in block size allows greater flexibility if numbers are likely to vary from year to year. If there will be only limited numbers of foreign invitees for the first international race, future expansion of the premises should be a consideration. In early years, it may be worth comparing the cost of permanent facilities with the use of modular buildings and demountable yards and stables.

Enclosed barn style units afford better security, can be more easily air-conditioned and screened to exclude insects and birds. Close attention should be paid to ventilation and air quality if barns of this

type are used. All surfaces must be able to withstand repeated cleaning and disinfection.

Major service points for electricity, water and sewage should be located away from the horses and in positions which minimise unnecessary traffic within the facility, ideally outside the perimeter fence. Likewise, the fodder store and stable waste collection area should be sited so that service vehicles do not have to enter the premises.

When stabling is at a distance from the training track, access should be fenced to control the media and safeguard horses on their way to and from the track.

The overall challenge is to design a facility which is convenient for visiting horses and personnel and allows press photo opportunities without compromising the health status or safety of horses.

## **FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT**

If the racing authority wishes to establish a reputation for hosting a successful international race, foreign visitors must have access to the full range of amenities available in a normal training stable.

General requirements include a well-lit loading area and access to water for cleaning and disinfection of vehicles; high pressure cleaning equipment; insect protection equipment; adequate fire precautions; office and telephone for a security guard; large loose boxes with adequate lighting, insulation and ventilation; vermin proof feed and bedding storage area; tack/feed room for each trainer; toilet and washroom with storage for overclothing and footwear near the primary access point; fenced sandroll, day yards, horse washes (preferably with hot water), weighing scales, skips for stable waste, washing machine, tea room/canteen with sink, refrigerator and television set. Accommodation for grooms must be available nearby.

As the mean bodyweight of racehorses can decrease by 20 kg as a result of long distance air transport (Leadon and Watkins 1995), provision of weighing scales to monitor recovery of bodyweight is particularly important.

## **HYGIENE REQUIREMENTS AND INSECT VECTOR PROTECTION**

Because Australia is free of equine influenza, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service imposes strict hygiene requirements on quarantine premises approved to house racehorses temporarily imported. Although such practices may not be implemented by government authorities in other

countries, racing authorities hosting international races also pay close attention to hygiene to minimise risks of disease spread.

Vehicles used to transport foreign horses between the airport and the premises should be cleaned and disinfected. Isolation stables should also be cleaned and disinfected before and after use, and equipment used for feeding, handling and grooming horses should be used exclusively within the premises. Persons entering the centre to handle foreign horses, who regularly handle domestic horses (eg veterinarians, farrier, track riders and jockeys), should wear dedicated overclothing and footwear inside the premises and wash thoroughly before entry and exit.

Particular attention should be paid to decontamination of veterinary equipment and to providing dedicated stomach tubes and an endoscope. Appropriate containers should be provided for the hygienic storage of manure, soiled bedding and other stable waste.

Contact between horses from different countries or regions should be avoided and each group should exercise at separate times according to a pre-determined schedule.

In locations where potential exists for transmission of disease by insects or ticks, protection measures should be applied. These may include application of insecticides, regular fogging and spraying of the premises and adjacent areas with appropriate insecticides, insect screening of stables, strict attention to drainage and hygienic disposal of stable manure and other organic material to minimise breeding sites for insects, habitat modification, 'insectocuter' devices in stables, fly bait traps and keeping horses indoors at times of peak vector activity. Needles and syringes used to administer injections and collect blood should be used once only.

## OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

All personnel and foreign visitors should be briefed thoroughly well in advance of the arrival of horses. Standard operating procedures, approved by quarantine authorities if appropriate, should be documented and distributed. A detailed health record should be kept for each horse including a record of its daily rectal temperature.

Good communication between officials and visitors is essential. Security staff must be provided with contact numbers for all relevant stakeholders and have 24 h access to a telephone.

Appointment of a press liaison officer and proactive briefing of other interested parties, including the press and peak industry bodies, may

be necessary to promote public confidence in procedures and avoid ill-informed speculation about exotic disease risk to the domestic horse population. During horse exercise sessions outside the secure facility, the press liaison officer should also always be available to assist and control the media. Providing regular but controlled access helps to prevent the media from becoming a nuisance in their endeavours to obtain photographs and interviews.

Contingency planning is also important and consideration should be given to procedures which will apply if a visiting horse suffers a life threatening illness or serious breakdown during training which requires its removal from the premises for surgical intervention. Additional restrictions likely to apply to the premises in the event of an exotic or endemic disease outbreak should be discussed and agreed in advance.

## SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In Australia, government standards for post arrival quarantine premises for horses are annexed to quarantine import conditions which are available from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service office in the state of import. Information on government standards for horse quarantine facilities in the United States of America may be found in the Code of Federal Regulations (Anon 1992a). Quarantine facilities for horses in the United Arab Emirates have recently been described by Farr (1996).

## REFERENCES

- Anon (1992a) *Code of Federal Regulations*. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA, Hyattsville. pp 328-357
- Anon (1992b) *International Agreement on Breeding and Racing*. International Federation of Racing Authorities, Paris.
- Bork, R.L. (1994) The Arlington experience. In: *Proceedings Equine Infectious Disease - Developing an Action Plan*. Maxwell H. Gluck Equine Research Center, University of Kentucky pp 13-14.
- Farr, N (1996) The quarantine of horses in the United Arab Emirates. *Equine vet. Educ.* **8**, 6-7.
- Leadon, D.P. and Watkins, K. (1995) Recovery periods prior to racing after long distance air transport. *Proc. 10th Int. Conf. racing Anal. Vet.* Eds: P. Kallings, U. Bondesson and E. Houghton. R&W Publications, Newmarket, pp 153
- Timoney, P.J. (1994) Disease risks and international movement. *Proc. 7th Int. Conf. equine inf. dis.* Eds: W. Plowright and H. Nakajima, R&W Publications (Newmarket) Ltd, pp 290-291.